



Farm work is real men's work. 'The stacking team' at Hollybank Farm, Dunsandel, c.1930s? Courtesy of Millie Jones.

Both of these photos show rural men's work during the 1930s, and reveal the continuing importance of the horse in this period.



Ploughing the field, c.1930s. Courtesy of Bill Gillespie.

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his youth.¹⁵⁶ Farming men were masculine man, and work defined their lives. Jack Ford's father drove a six-horse team and although he started at five, and ended at five, he then had to feed and water the horses, which meant that he did not finish till almost ten o'clock.¹⁵⁷ He had little time for leisure (see chapter VIII): 'work was the order of the day from daylight to dusk'.¹⁵⁸ In this period most rural occupations, either farming or labouring, required strength. Small farmers sometimes had to supplement their incomes with wage labour. Mr Ryan worked on the roads, and Mr Partridge worked at the mill in harvest season. Edna proudly recalled her father's strength 'all the grain had to be carried on men's backs and big corn sacks up the stairs and into storage, and it was all loaded and unloaded onto men's backs . . . I think they were 220 lbs, and my dad could always, he just used to put them on his shoulder and when he was about 72, he was still doing it.'¹⁵⁹

The community had clear conceptions about gender divisions in rural areas, which extended throughout all social classes in the country. Men should not do inside work but were supposed to carry out rough household chores. Jack Ford commented that his father never washed a dish, or worked in the garden.¹⁶⁰ 'They expected the little lady to, even to turn down the bed at night time before they went to bed, I can still hear my father calling my mother "You haven't turned the bed down yet you know". Men didn't do much in the house in those days, not really'.¹⁶¹ Edna explained her father fulfilled the duties expected of a good husband. In the days of wood stoves women required a steady supply of firewood, and people considered it hard if (like Mrs Jones) women had to chop their own wood.

It was an absolutely unbreakable rule that the kindling box had to be filled every night and the wood box in the corner full of chopped wood. . . That was one of the yardsticks by which you measured a good husband in those days, did he keep the woodshed full? Well, my Dad I am proud to say he did keep the woodshed full.¹⁶²

If this 'yardstick' is used, the Jones, Trembath, and Ryan men would not be considered ideal husbands. Mrs Ryan became permanently injured by a chip of wood that hit her in the head when she was chopping wood. His relations regarded Mr Trembath as lazy, though he did chain-arrow paddocks, milk cows and clear land. One uncle told Mary 'if your father had worked harder, he could have had you [children] all away at the Diocesan [high school], and I

¹⁵⁶ Kevin McNeil, 18.5.95, p.2.

¹⁵⁷ Jack Ford, 4.10.94, p.3.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*, 13.4.95, p.26.

¹⁵⁹ E. Partridge, 19.10.94, p.5.

¹⁶⁰ While urban families regarded growing vegetables as man's work, in rural areas women and children often looked after the garden. A few farming men did garden. For example, Mr Partridge grew most produce for the family and kept bees. E. Partridge, 19.10.94, p.8.

¹⁶¹ Jack Ford, 2.3.95, p.12.

¹⁶² E. Partridge, 19.10.94, p.6.

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said “You mean the whole six of us”.¹⁶³

Some obvious conclusions can be drawn about rural family structures and husband-wife relationships. Male control over family life, especially on farms, emerges as more patriarchal than masculinist. Men retained more control over home and family, unlike city men who let their wives run the household. This situation occurred most strongly on farms, but also appeared in non-farming families. Secondly, the concept of separate spheres could not be applied cleanly to rural living. Women’s work, on farms, and to a lesser extent in small rural towns, included economic as well as social reproduction.¹⁶⁴ Women cooked, cleaned, took care of children, and often cooked for workers as well as family, they produced butter which could be bartered or sold, worked on the farm, tended gardens, preserved produce and ensured the smooth running of farm and home. They were an essential part of farming enterprises, and as wives of labourers they helped supplement the family income. Middle class women such as Mrs Golding also helped to support the family. The Buchanans, who were part of the rural elite, were the exception. The elite in country areas, rich farmers, professionals, or large businessmen, as did the majority of farming families. Yet the majority of family farmers lived lives distinct from urban living. Although the concept of separate spheres cannot be directly applied to the countryside, considerable gender separation existed. Women’s tasks might blur gender roles but men’s seldom did. Women’s work and men’s work remained separate.

This evidence shows that family life in the countryside, particularly on small family farms, responded far more slowly to modern ideologies, than in urban families. The yeoman farmer, or labourer with a small holding, held on to a concept of pride and independence that had its roots in the British past, and had little to do with the modern capitalist economy of wage labour. People still believed implicitly in the value of country living, and thought of ‘townies’ as inferior, or even as parasites.¹⁶⁵ Farms in the twenties and thirties still existed partially in a non-cash economy. While the growing trend towards consumerism did become evident in the increasing number of motor vehicles, the depression greatly hindered this trend. Farmers put off workers, wives sometimes got rid of servants (though the depression provided a pool of cheap or free female labour), they made more necessities, ate their own produce, bartered with grocers and neighbours, and reverted to the experiences of years back. This ability to retrench depended on debt levels and some families lost their land, but that it could be done shows that farms in this period were still fairly self-sufficient entities. Yet farmers could not wholly escape from the international economy, and so rural areas remained a mixture of old and new, conservatism and innovation, and modern trends impinged on the

¹⁶³ M.Trembath, 31.12.96, p.3.

¹⁶⁴ Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.52.

¹⁶⁵ Gwen Somerset recalled that the inhabitants of Oxford called teachers, clergy, bank managers and clerks, ‘parasites’. G. Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, p.138.

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family farm. Modern ideas about work and gender separation, as personified in the story at the beginning of the chapter, could not be ignored by rural families. Attitudes to women and children's labour and ideas about child-rearing shifted in this period. Family life continued in the midst of these struggles, responding to or resisting change. But the values of the pioneers, the hard working yeoman and his equally hard working wife became less attractive to the generation of children growing up in the twenties. The next chapter tells their story.

Chapter VI

‘The Best and Sturdiest?’ Country Children and Parent/Child Relationships in Interwar New Zealand

The Home the Sheet Anchor

When all is said and done the home is the anchor that binds the boy to the farm. If to him it is a place of harmony, of pleasant social intercourse and of complete understanding it will, when the years pass and youth is but a memory, be the sweetest spot in the recollections of the boy now grown to manhood. Suitable companionship, healthy amusement, feeling that father and mother are confidants and not taskmasters - these factors will do more than aught else to keep the boy upon the farm when he attains the years of discretion.¹

New Zealand society idealised rural childhood in the interwar years and beyond. Dorothy Johnson wrote in 1951 that ‘it is undoubtedly true that the country is the best place in which to bring up children - in fact, country-bred children are one of a nation’s most important products’.² Society believed that country living bred citizens who were hardy, closer to nature, and imbued with the pioneering spirit. Urban living, in contrast, bred decadence, ill-health, and a dependence on artificial amusements.³

Thus revelations in the 1920s that rural school children suffered from poor health and overwork shocked the country.⁴ The *Westport Times* commented in 1926 that ‘in theory the country children should be among the best developed and sturdiest of our juvenile population’, but studies had revealed this to be a fallacy. ‘It is true that in a well-to-do farming district good nutrition and physical development are the rule, but the struggle of life in the backblocks often tells hardly on the children’.⁵ Some rural people shared these concerns and correspondence in the *New Zealand Farmer* debated the morality of child labour. Again the family values of ‘modern’ society conflicted with the realities of people’s lives. Ideology and practice were often awkward companions. The government and middle class observers could easily dismiss the child worker in the cities as an aberration, caused by lack of hard work or improvidence on the part of the parents. They could not dismiss the working children of hard-working yeoman parents so easily.

Authorities were united in the opposing child labour in the countryside. Revelations about hard-working country children evoked images of child slavery and counteracted the

¹ *New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal*, January, 1919, p.113.

² D. Johnson, *The Child and His Family*, NZ Department of Agriculture, Bulletin, No.337, 1951, p.2.

³ See Chapter I for Shelley’s statement on the detrimental effects of urban living.

⁴ ‘Sickly Children’, *Auckland Star*, 15.9.26, in Report on Rural School Children, H35/8911 35/78.

⁵ ‘The Country Child’, *Westport Times*, 23.9.26, in H35/8911 35/78.

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prevailing ideology of the dependent child. Various government reports lamented rural children's excessive workload, while teachers argued that weariness made country children dull and slow to learn. Doctors' comments reveal a genuine concern for children's health but also a fear that work made children 'unchildlike'. A government investigation into rural children's health in the late 1920s discovered that in dairying regions where children and mothers worked in the milking sheds, children's health suffered. The doctor commented 'The children from these homes are old-young children. Many have lined anxious faces, their clothing is of the poorest, and as the all powerful cow is the first consideration, the children are a poor second'.⁶ Yet parents needed their children's work. The courts took punitive action in severe cases of child exploitation, but no agency could discover a viable solution to the perceived wide-spread problem of child labour in the country. Some doubted whether it could be defined as child exploitation, because it took place within the family. Society's stereotypes of child labour consisted of stark queues of stunted children in Britain trudging to dirty, smoke-belching factories.⁷ Nothing could be further from the wholesome image of rural New Zealand.

The yeoman farmer and his colonial helpmeet scraped a living from their small farm by using the labour of their children. The previous chapter noted that New Zealand had extremely high family labour rates compared to countries such as the United States. On farms, family labour contributed towards the household and indirectly towards the national economy. Our discussion of rural childhood began with reference to child labour because many rural children formed part of a working economy. Farming children and the children of rural workers often carried out more extensive tasks than urban working class children. Thus children's role within country families remained subtly different than in towns.

Evidence about rural children, both in New Zealand and England, is scanty, especially for the interwar period. Various historians in New Zealand (Brooking, Day, Toynbee, and Arnold) have examined the lives of rural children, but have usually studied them within the wider context of some other study, or have dealt with different periods. Few studies have focused on the interwar period. A similar lack of material exists in Britain, and Steve Hussey, a British rural historian, could find little secondary material about rural childhood, especially in the period between the wars.⁸

The institution of patriarchy, reinforced by the economic conditions in the countryside,

⁶ 'Children of farmers in remote districts. Poor.' Included in memorandum to the Director, Division of School Hygiene, Wellington, from E. Gunn, 26th November 1926, H35/8911 35/78.

⁷ Mavis Benson recalled being taught about child labour at school. 'When we did the lessons on child labour we knew . . . what the immigrants have come from - have got it into the New Zealanders' - the Kiwis' minds that if they didn't pull their socks up [that was what could happen].' She reflected that her own accounts of work could be regarded as child labour but 'we were thinking in the terms of the factory workers, the days the long hours and the little food that they had - was what they called child labour in England in the early days'. Mavis Benson, 19.5.95, p.15.

⁸ Steve Hussey, "'We Rubbed Along All Right'": The Rural Working Class Household Between the Wars in North Essex and South Buckinghamshire', PhD Sociology, University of Essex, 1994, p.119.

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shaped parent-child relationships within the country. Rollo Arnold, a New Zealand social historian, has suggested that the transformation of the family proved difficult in colonial conditions. In nineteenth century Britain the patriarchal family gradually disappeared, and families became linked by ties of sentiment and affection, rather than by economic forces. By contrast, in colonial New Zealand, economic necessity, combined with a belief in the yeoman farmer, or the industrial craftsman,⁹ meant that older family structures lingered.¹⁰ The family economy had largely disappeared in the towns by the interwar years but still operated in the countryside.¹¹ While the role of children in rural families has some parallels with Britain, children in rural New Zealand worked largely for their families, whereas a significant proportion of rural children in England worked for wage labour, reflecting the larger rural working class.¹² Another difference is that children of both sexes laboured in the country. Girls worked on the farm as well as in the house.

The thesis has suggested that divergent family patterns, patriarchal and masculinist, had developed in rural and urban New Zealand. Two aspects of the patriarchal family impinged on relationships between parents and children: the existence of a family or household economy, and authoritarian family relationships.¹³ The rural family, especially the farming family, showed these characteristics. Families functioned as economic and social units, characterised by patriarchal structures, authoritarian control, and hard physical labour. These family structures determined how rural parents disciplined, interacted with their children, and the extent to which they incorporated new ideas about child-rearing. Patriarchy reinforced parental control over children, and in the countryside fewer distractions existed to interfere with this control. Modern ideology stressed children's individuality, whereas old ideals stressed the right to determine children's lives. These ideas were mutually incompatible and conflict emerged most often over attitudes to schooling. Toynbee explains 'Here was a significant clash between patriarchal and masculinist interests, for education provided the potential, not only for children's labour to be compulsorily withdrawn for most of the working day, but also for parents' control over their children more generally to be undermined.'¹⁴ The argument for a rural/urban variation in family structure can be validated

⁹ Olssen, in his study on Caversham, suggests that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'a household economy continued to survive in the handicraft sector, characterised by domestic production, although it became less common.' Erik Olssen, *Building a New World, work, politics and society in Caversham 1880s to 1920s*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1995, p.53.

¹⁰ Arnold, quoted in Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His, Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1995, p.168.

¹¹ See Olssen, *Building a New World*, p.53.

¹² Hussey shows that in the villages he studied 'only a minority of rural working-class households could ever confidently rely on a single source of income such was the low level and frailty of many men's wages'. Hussey, 'We Rubbed Along All Right', p.167. Children's wages tended to be very low, however. He quotes a contemporary rural observer who said that 'these pitiful little earnings could hardly make a perceptible difference to the average income', Hussey, 'We Rubbed Along All Right', p.129.

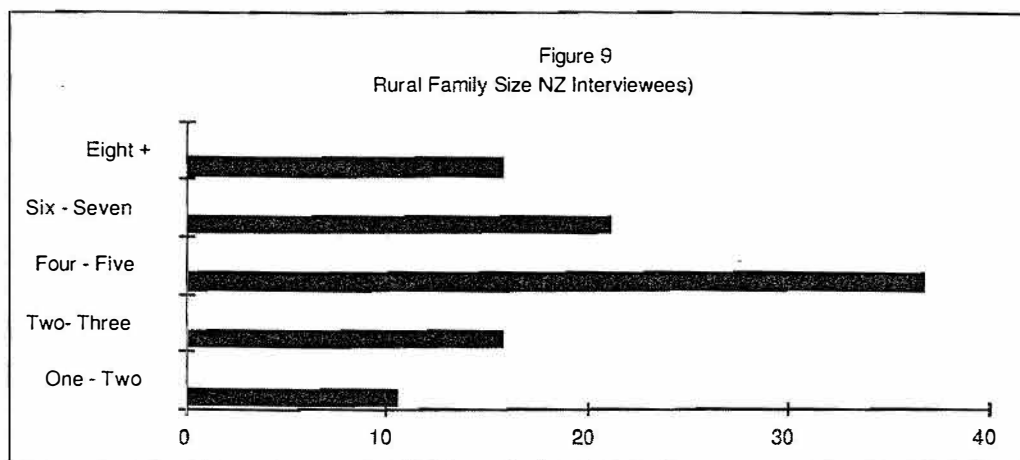
¹³ Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.168.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.170.

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through studying the strong patriarchal elements present in rural families.

I



Rural parents continued to have large families well into the interwar years because children were a resource, as well as an expense, in the countryside. In 1927 the average rural family had 4 children, while urban families had 3.5 children (see figure 3, chapter IV).¹⁵ The largest country family in this study had fourteen children and families of one or two children were uncommon. Rural parents tended to prefer sons to daughters because boys could help with the outside work and possibly take over the farm, whereas a girl could only be a farmer's wife. Even though women had been farmers in their own right in the early 1900s the prospect of a girl becoming a farmer in her own right never occurred to anyone as a possibility. The mechanisation of farming methods in the 1920s made women's labour less important. Edna recalled her parents' happiness when her younger brother arrived. 'In those days to have a son was the all-important thing - he was always made much of . . . they always used to talk about giving a favourite child the top brick off the chimney, mother would have given him the whole chimney too'.¹⁶ Although Mary Trembath's father was pleased when he had a son, Mary thought he did not welcome having such a large family, since they would become more of a liability than an asset. 'I think my father thought children were going to be a lot more work for him, he was fond of riding down and having his little bet on the horse and meeting his friends and that'.¹⁷

Older norms of child-rearing changed more slowly in rural areas because modern methods usually required intensive parental involvement, and were difficult to implement in a large family. *Feeding and Care of Baby* presupposed that the mother had little else to do

¹⁵ Delyn Day, 'The Politics of Knitting: A Study of the New Zealand Women's Institutes and the Women's Division of the New Zealand Farmer's Union 1920-1940', Post graduate diploma in history, University of Otago, Dunedin, 1991, p.34. See chapter IV.

¹⁶ E.Partridge, 7.2.95, p.22.

¹⁷ M.Trembath, 31.12.96.

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except follow a Truby King programme. King did not promote excessive fondness or indulgence of children (quite the opposite in fact) but he promoted a commitment to children, and exact routines that did not accommodate other children, household work, or allow for the existence of hard farm work. In the reality of small farm life, as Jean Bevan commented (previous chapter), older children helped bring up the younger ones, sharing the role of 'mother'. These factors made new ideas about child-rearing harder to implement, and ideas often took longer to reach the countryside. For example, Plunket facilities developed unevenly, and were established first in areas closest to cities, before spreading into more remote or newly developed country areas. As a result women in remote high country areas in the South Island and pioneering settlements in the North Island did not gain access to Plunket till the thirties and forties.

Authorities became concerned that rural parents were becoming backward in comparison to urban families and attempted to introduce modern ideas about child-rearing through country women's organisations and popular magazines.¹⁸ New Zealand had begun to turn away from rural idealism and the American view of the countryside as backward and in need of education became influential. Dorothy Johnson, writing on behalf of the Department of Agriculture in *The Child and his Family* (published in 1951), introduced concepts of child development. She used some psychological detail to emphasise the importance of her message, saying that 'the psychiatrist to the American armed forces unhesitatingly laid the blame for the failure of many thousands of young men on their home life'.¹⁹ While psychological ideas impinged on child-rearing advice, these were dressed in plain country language to suit their perceived audience. Other types of child-rearing advice for country women followed similar patterns. The interwar emphasis on the importance of play, sunshine and fresh air, emerges, but is devoid of intellectual embroidering. The opening quotation in this chapter, 'Home the Sheet Anchor', typifies the style of child-rearing advice in the *New Zealand Farmer*. The writers emphasised practicality, and sound advice, rather than the psychological insights included in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*. Although rural women may have read the *Weekly*, they were more likely to have access to journals such as the *New Zealand Farmer*, which appealed to men and proffered useful farming advice. While it is impossible to determine whether people followed advice columns such as these, some interest in new ideas emerges in interviews for this study.

Advice columnists and child-rearing experts aimed their advice almost exclusively at rural mothers, ignoring other care-givers such as fathers, grandparents or older siblings. They promoted an understanding of child-development, and a dedication to *motherhood*, not fatherhood. The *New Zealand Farmer* told mothers how to cope 'When Baby has a Bad

¹⁸The *New Zealand Farmer* and women's magazines ran articles about child development.

¹⁹ This booklet usually avoids such ominous language, gently informing the reader of practical issues in child development. Johnson, *The Child and his Family*, p.3.

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Day', and urged them to let their children explore the world, and make them toy gardens.²⁰ These ideas reveal a Froebellian influence and stress the importance of play as a means of education. The emphasis on the mother belonged in a masculinist rather than a patriarchal system, where the father abdicated control over the home to his wife.

Although rural areas received new ideas later, country women could not escape being exposed to twentieth century ideas about child-rearing. One writer to the *New Zealand Farmer* in 1928 endorsed modern methods of child-rearing, proudly signing herself 'modern mother'. She firmly countered criticism of modern youth by celebrating change, commenting 'there are few young parents in these days who are not interested in up-to-date methods of bringing up young children'. She regarded these methods as a vast improvement from the days when women 'blindly followed the advice of their mothers, or even their grandmothers'. Women who relied on books could differentiate themselves from an older era of ignorance and superstition. The writer could state with confidence that since the babies of 20 years ago were 'smothered in thick garments, petted and coddled, fed by no definite rule,' it was not surprising 'that healthy children were the exception rather than the rule'.²¹ Her letter identifies the change from the parent-centred to the child-centred family, which transformed family life in the twentieth century.²² She claimed that authoritarian methods of child-rearing were disappearing and that the modern mother 'was more a companion than a stern parent' to her children. 'She plays with them and understands them in a new and more subtle way; she dresses them with an eye to daintiness and beauty'. This transformation in mothering combined with the creation of a more child-focused family, produced better and healthier citizens. 'Indeed, this era might well be called the children's age, when it is compared with the Victorian times, which were decidedly more comfortable for the parents than for their repressed offspring'.²³

Scientific motherhood may have strengthened the role of country mothers. Advice columns ignored fathers, and that may have been part of the attraction in an era where men still held the balance of power in many rural households. It also seems probable that statistics about declining infant mortality supported claims about the superiority of new ways, arousing enthusiasm for change. Attitudes to scientific mothering also varied according to generation. Younger women may have found that these new ideas lessened dependence and subordination to an older generation of women. They provided ammunition in the battle against mothers and mothers-in-law. These arguments provide a balance to suggestions by feminist writers that early twentieth century experts downgraded femininity. One writer described Truby

²⁰ 'Strengthening the Love for Home', *NZF*, p.1131. Emelyn L. Collidge M.D., 'Children's Feet', Faith Robinson, 'Telling Baby to Hurt Things' and Toy Gardens, *NZF*, 1 September, 1919, p.1266. 'When Baby Has a Bad Day', *NZF*, 1 March, 1928, p.349.

²¹ A Change in Mothers, "A Modern Mother" (Raumai), *NZF*, 1 March, 1928, p.352.

²² Toynee, *Her Work and His*, p.186.

²³ 'A Change in Mothers', *NZF*, 1 March, 1928, p.352.

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King's 'mothercraft as 'implacable masculinity'.²⁴ Jane Lewis recounts how an Englishwoman who had brought up her children according to Truby King's regime recalled that 'it was practically incestuous to enjoy one's baby'.²⁵ Perhaps rather than espousing 'implacable masculinity' it can be argued that Truby King's regime reflected his Scottish Presbyterian background. The early Plunket books undoubtedly have a Calvinist quality, which is revealed in a denial of pleasure, and rigid adherence to a disciplined regime.

Feminist arguments have some validity but scientific ideas about child rearing cannot simply have been imposed on mothers. It would be wrong to believe that women adopted ideas unwillingly or without modification. Philippa Mein Smith's study suggested that despite scientific methods 'it remained customary for mothers to listen to their own mothers'.²⁶ As suggested in the chapter on urban children, parents probably relied on advice for their first baby, but would have gained confidence and self-reliance with subsequent children.²⁷ Parenting remained a dialogue between experience and ideas. Edna Partridge remembered a Plunket nurse visiting the youngest baby in her family, but commented, 'it's not to say that mother was not in command of her household though'.²⁸ Obviously expert advice fulfilled certain needs among mothers, and the reasons suggested in the previous paragraph may have contributed to their popularity.

Plunket grew rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s although rural areas continued to be less well-provided with clinics. In 1917 Plunket had 90 branches or sub-branches with 25 Plunket nurses, and 11,000 babies under care.²⁹ By 1922 there were 60 nurses, and in 1923 they claimed responsibility for 35,000 babies.³⁰ In the 1930s nurses in rural areas acquired cars, which made visits to country mothers easier. The Thames Plunket branch acquired a motor car (in the late 1930s, early 1940s) and 'the expense of getting a car was fully justified by the increased number of mothers and babies seen, especially on the Hauraki plains'.³¹ Thus Mrs Trembath, the wife of a small farmer on the plains, did not have Plunket for her babies, but

²⁴ 'Although intense interest in babies had succeeded the apathy of the last two decades, the hallmark of motherhood was now anxiety. The young mother had been "shorn of her maternal instinct"'. C. Hardyment, *Dream Babies Child Care from Locke to Spock*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1983, p.116, see also p.xiv.

²⁵ Jane Lewis, quoted in S.Griffiths, 'Feminism and the Ideology of Motherhood 1896-1930', MA Thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, 1984, p.138.

²⁶ Philippa Mein-Smith, *Mothers and King Baby Infant Survival and Welfare in an Imperial World: Australia 1880-1950*, Macmillan Press, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London, 1997, p. 178.

²⁷ Mein-Smith's work supports this argument and she concluded that even 'intimidated mothers were selective about what aspects of the regimens to discard or adopt', *ibid*.

²⁸ E.Partridge, 19.10.94, p.3.

²⁹ G. Parry, *A Fence at the Top The first 75 years of the Plunket Society*, John MacIndoe, Dunedin, 1982, p.65.

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 77. Mein-Smith noted a sharp increase in numbers of mothers attending clinics in Victoria between the 1920s and the 1940s but cautions that these number may have been inflated by rising numbers of individual attendances and increasing attendances by older children. Mein-Smith, *Mothers and King Baby*, p.180.

³¹ Parry, *A Fence at the Top*, p.86. For example, in 1945 the Greymouth nurse visited small settlements on the West Coast, and had a considerable range. She and her assistant visited Runanga, Kūnara, Reefton, Otira, Arthurs Pass, Taylorville, Rura, Kotuka and Blackball, and occasionally visited as far as Haast Pass, p.87.

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her daughters did.³² Most rural people in this study were born before Plunket became well-established in rural areas. Only the Bevan, Jones, Greenes, and the youngest Partridge children were Plunket babies.³³ Elizabeth Greene's mother died of pernicious anaemia when she was two months old, so her father gave her 'humanised milk'. She wrote, 'Along also came Truby King and his new formula. Up until that time babies who had lost their mothers had to have a wet nurse. I was the first baby in the Malvern district [in 1920] to try out his formula'.³⁴

Sometimes a conflict emerged between parents. Some rural men opposed new ideas, in contrast with urban men, who seemed happy to leave the mechanics of child-rearing to their wives. Mr Walker had definite ideas about child-rearing and dictated to his wife. Marjorie recalled her mother saying that friends in Dunedin wrote about the Plunket society, and she longed for the support of Plunket herself:

She has often talked about that to me in later years but father wouldn't have been interested, he had his own fairly fixed views about child care which I believe he imposed on my mother quite a bit. His mother although untrained was the local midwife in Heriot, and had a lot of knowledge and opinions I suppose on child-rearing. I think Dad's views were a reflection of hers.

Her mother obviously resented her husband's emphasis on breast-feeding (itself a Truby King idea), since she told Marjorie that she 'attempted to breastfeed Nan [her eldest child] far longer than she [should] and that Dad had insisted that she persevered beyond what she thought proper'.³⁵ It is not clear when she thought proper to wean her children, but most European women, town or country, did not seem to breast feed for long, and many did not breastfeed till nine or twelve months as Truby King recommended.³⁶ Mrs Jones followed Truby King's methods against her husband's wishes, and without his knowledge. 'She had to if she wanted a quiet life'. The extent of his opposition can be gauged by the fact that he kept Millie from taking her own children to Plunket when she lived at their home. Millie recalled 'I was a Plunket baby. It wasn't in when Rose and Jean were babies, but Mum said I was a Plunket baby.' Her mother walked the two miles to Templeton to take Millie to the Plunket nurse. She did not adopt the whole Plunket regime since 'there was fourteen [in her family] and she was oldest girl so she knew all about babies but she followed their standards of feeding and when they went on to solids'.³⁷

³² The 1931 annual report claimed that 67% of New Zealand babies came under the care of Plunket. Parry, *A Fence at the Top*, p. 102.

³³ Eric Robinson (who later moved to the city) was born in Temuka in 1919, and explained 'we were all Plunket babies - well once he [Truby King] started up we were all Plunket babies'. E. Robinson, 10.6.96, p.7.

³⁴ Elizabeth Greene (pseudonym), hand-written manuscript, p.2.

³⁵ M. Walker, 20.10.94, p.6.

³⁶ Truby King, *Feeding and Care of Baby*, Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., 1937, p.32.

³⁷ M. Jones, 17.9.96, p.22. Millie was born in 1918 and her sisters Rose and Jean were born in 1912 and 1914

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Generational conflict also emerged. Grandmothers provided assistance with children, but some mothers resented their ideas and regarded them as old-fashioned. The Goldings provide a useful example of this conflict between the old and the new. Mrs Golding followed the Plunket regime. She took an active role in the community and organised many local entertainments. Annette performed in her mother's concerts at the age of three, 'they would say let Lucy Annette take her place - for an absentee - and I knew a cantata off by heart'. After performing for a while she developed a stammer, and Mrs Golding wrote to Sir Truby King for advice. She asked whether the stammer occurred in reaction to performing at a young age, and he replied 'not to burden me, and certainly not to slap me and hit me as my grandmother had said she should, but just to patiently help me say the words that I was stammering on'.³⁸ Our sympathies would definitely be with Truby King's advice rather than Annette's grandmother, but this story illustrates how women used outside agencies both for advice and as a means to establish control over their children.

New ideas about child-rearing had some influence but traditional methods dominated among the interviewees included in this study. Experienced mothers continued to rear their infants and children as before. Mary Trembath (born 1912, youngest sibling born in the mid 1920s) responded to the question about Plunket by saying, 'they [her mother's generation] had seen babies reared from their mothers' big families', and followed their mother's practices. These practices would have horrified Truby King since Mary explained that women without sufficient breast milk supplemented the diet with bread sops (bread soaked in milk) and her mother kept the babies in bed with her. A sick child was 'popped in the bed with the parent to keep it warm and comfortable'.³⁹ Truby King thought that the mother's bed was the worst place to put a baby to sleep since the child could be suffocated by overlying and 'poisoned by inhaling the breath of the mother'.⁴⁰ Mary fondly recalled the security and comfort of sleeping with her mother, but kept her own babies in a bassinette.

The proliferation of advice on child-rearing (see chapter IV) provided guides to parenthood very different from those of earlier generations. Experts promoted the child's individuality and urged that parents' help them attain their full potential. The new ideologies of childhood stressed that children should play and express their individuality. They believed the child's needs should be paramount and that child care involved more than physical fulfilment of a child's needs.

In contrast, older attitudes to children were rather more utilitarian, emphasising obedience and subordination. Parents regarded children's time as disposable, and individual needs were submerged by the requirements of the whole family. Children served rather than were served by their parents. Rural parents in this study largely followed these older

respectively.

³⁸ Annette Golding, 16.5.95, p.1.

³⁹ Mary put her own babies in a bassinette. Mary Trembath, 2.1.97, p.9, 31.12.96, p.4.

⁴⁰ King, *Feeding and Care of Baby*, p.48.

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attitudes; emerging as sterner, less openly affectionate, and exercising considerable control over their children's lives. Supervision of children could be difficult for hard-working parents, however, since country children had a fair amount of physical freedom, and could escape from adult supervision (once the chores were done) with greater ease than town children. Boys especially could roam free. Perhaps this is one reason for the greater use of the strap and cane in country areas. One must not equate authoritarianism with a lack of love for children. Edna Partridge recalled her father crying when a baby died, 'it's the only time I ever saw my father weep and I remember he said "the baby's dead"'.⁴¹ Obviously parents still loved and cared for their children but the style of parenting in the countryside did not promote open affection and indulgence of children.

II

Recollections commonly depict country parents as strict disciplinarians, authoritarian, and often emotionally distant. Although these characteristics apply to both parents, they emerged most often in reference to country fathers. Thirteen interviewees described their mothers as being outwardly affectionate but only seven people described their fathers in those terms. None of the small farming families described their father as being openly affectionate and relationships appeared better among the more prosperous families. Frances Denniston, for example, 'thought an awful lot of my father, he was a wonderful man'.⁴² A few people commented that they knew they were loved and valued although their parents were not outwardly affectionate. For the majority of rural children fathers appeared somewhat distant, and sometimes forbidding figures.

Country people, like urban working class interviewees, expressed deep admiration for their mothers. In part parents enforced respect, but mothers also earned such respect through their hard work. The mother's role as housewife and worker dominated her role as mother in many cases. People's descriptions of their mother's personality are inextricably intertwined with descriptions of her housewifery. Country mothers showed their love through labour. Irene Keehan showed admiration for her mother by describing her mother refurbishing clothes by candlelight, 'mum would turn them undo them all and string them up again', and bathing her children in tubs, by lugging 'buckets and buckets of water into the copper'.⁴³

Mrs Benson, Jones, and Bevan were described as warm and loving women but few interviewees depicted their mothers as openly affectionate.⁴⁴ Many interviewees recalled their mother as being extremely busy most of the time, and they focused their attention on younger children. Edna Partridge explained that her mother 'was devoted to the little ones, to the babies, the babies were all her care and there was always a baby you see'. Edna supposed

⁴¹ E.Partridge, 22.3.95, p.42.

⁴² F.Denniston, 14.6.90, side 3 of 8, hand-written abstract.

⁴³ Mrs Keehan gave birth to nine children and worked very hard throughout her life. I.Keehan, 21.4.95, p.3.

⁴⁴ See interviews with M.Benson, J.Bevan, and M.Jones.

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she was indulged as a small child. 'I was the oldest grandchild for a number of years and I know I must have been made much of in those years'.⁴⁵

Extensive work-loads meant that women had little time to take care of their children and country children often played unsupervised, with occasional disastrous results. Stories of accidents abound. One child wrote to the *New Zealand Farmer* describing an incident where a hop jar burst and a piece of glass hit her below the eye. She took the accident philosophically and commented 'I got a whole week's rest from the cowshed through it.'⁴⁶ Farming families treated many ailments themselves since they had to travel to obtain treatment and often could not afford much time away from farm work. When Mrs Trembath took Mary to Thames hospital after she contracted blood poisoning in her leg, the journey took many hours. They had to go by gig to the train station, taking the train to Thames, then a taxi to the hospital. Mary's father usually treated any less serious injuries. When she got a 'stone bruise' at the age of five, 'Dad said "Well lay her across my knee here and give me my razor", and lay me across his knee and he sawed it through. . . he said 'no you're right now'.⁴⁷ From her recollection he does not seem to have been very gentle in his ministrations and expected her to be stoic and bear the pain without crying. It was unusual for a father to deal with children's complaints, as women mostly dealt with such problems. This finding suggests that country men had more physical contact with their children than urban families.

In general, the country father emerges as a remote and stern figure. Men faced pressures to appear unemotional and strong. Patriarchy shaped the father/child relationship by emphasising authority and control over affection and companionship. For example, Jack Ford explained that his father showed little outward affection to his children. 'I don't think fathers did in those days. They were the masters of the house and they certainly wouldn't be seen as being too compassionate'.⁴⁸ There were exceptions of course. Irene Keehan described her (Irish Catholic) father as being more emotional than her mother. He became terribly upset when his twin sons were conscripted into the army, especially since they had saved him from being conscripted in the last war. 'He'd cry at the look of a war but Mum had to be brave'.⁴⁹ Such examples seemed rare, however, especially among farmers.⁵⁰

Even affectionate rural men appeared more authoritarian than urban men. They exercised strenuous control over children but particularly over daughters. Older puritan ideals clashed with the freer appearance of 'modern' youth. Mr Evans treated his daughters affectionately but refused to let them attend dances, while allowing his sons greater

⁴⁵ E. Partridge, 7.2.95, p.18.

⁴⁶ Blossom, Kio Kio, *NZF*, 1 March, 1928, p.363.

⁴⁷ M. Trembath, 31.12.96, p.5.

⁴⁸ J. Ford, 21.3.95, p.14.

⁴⁹ I. Keehan, 21.4.95, p.4.

⁵⁰ Scarlet Primrose, Tinui, *NZF*, 1 May, 1933, p.366.

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freedom.⁵¹ Marjorie Walker described an occasion when her father was furious with her sister for attending a dance in a sleeveless dress. 'There was a terrible fuss when Dad saw the dress, she wasn't to go, and I know my grandfather said to Nan, he called her Nansy, "Could you no tack some sleeves in it and take them out when you get there". Mr Walker's battle to uphold his authority failed eventually because of opposition from his wife and daughters. An older friend offered to take Marjorie to a ball, and she persuaded her mother first, then asked her father. He replied 'I don't approve but I don't suppose I have any say'.⁵²

Country children had more contact with their fathers than most urban children but they still saw more of their mothers. Fathers worked long hours on the farm and some men travelled to find work. The 1930s depression resulted in Messrs Moss, Jones, and Benson working away from their families on work schemes. Mr Keehan worked as a drover and Irene explained that 'in those days they'd walk the sheep from Blenheim to Christchurch, and Dad and his brother were sheep drovers and they always had their dogs and their billy'.⁵³ Absence increased distance and physical exhaustion often hindered men from playing with their children. Very few fathers, or mothers, tucked their children in at night or read them a story. Edna Partridge explained that at a very early age they put themselves to bed.⁵⁴ Few children talked to their fathers about problems, and like urban children, most relied on their mother. Yet even stern fathers had their benevolent side. Human relations are too complex to be reduced to simplistic categories. Millie Jones described her father as strict but explained that he had an unerring eye for colour and style and gave useful sartorial advice. He also kept a supply of small change in his jacket which he said she could borrow if she ever needed money.⁵⁵ She valued these recollections of her father.

Physical contact with fathers (and mothers) usually related to work, rather than play. A child writing to the *New Zealand Farmer* wrote that 'On Friday, Dad and my brother went to a station five miles away for four hundred breeding ewes. It was my brother's first long ride, and when he arrived home he wasn't tired'.⁵⁶ This working relationship seldom occurred in urban families, except when a son or daughter went into a family business. For example, an English interviewee, Ray Sully, joined his father's merchant firm and managed to gain his father's respect and confidence, which he valued highly.⁵⁷ Some children, particularly boys, described the working relationship with their fathers as satisfying and they formed deeper emotional relationships with them as a result. These relationships stemmed from the interaction of father and son as man to man. Power relationships between father and son shifted significantly in adolescence. Masculinity carried its own recognition of worth and

⁵¹ J.Evans, 23.11.96, p.2.

⁵² M.Walker, 20.10.94, p.7.,

⁵³ I.Keehan, 21.4.95, p.5.

⁵⁴ E.Partridge, 24.1.95, p.14.

⁵⁵ M. Jones, 17.9.96, pp.26-27.

⁵⁶ Scarlet Primrose, Tinui, *NZF*, 1 May, 1933, p.366.

⁵⁷ R.Sully, 4.2.96, p.2.

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equality, though sons sometimes had to fight hard for recognition from their fathers. Kevin McNeil recalled a tremendous sense of pride when he began working with his father at the age of fifteen. He stooked wheat, which 'was hard work, that was real man's work'.⁵⁸ Fathers and daughters seldom established relationships with this mutual respect, although some daughters did establish a similar relationship with their mothers.⁵⁹

Puritanism dominated emotional relationships in the country especially between fathers and children, although a discernible difference emerges between Irish Catholic families, and Scottish Presbyterians. The Walkers were Presbyterians and Mr Walker especially followed a strict Puritan code. 'Mother asked him once if he would have taken alcohol if it would have saved his life and he said no'. Her mother, though also strict, was more flexible, 'we had swags of fun with mother'.⁶⁰ Irish Catholic families appear to have differed slightly from the authoritarian pattern. Although they emphasised obedience as strongly, they seemed to have a slightly more relaxed attitude to children. Kevin McNeil, Joan Brosnihan, and Irene Keehan described their parents as being warm and affectionate - not a common description of country parents.⁶¹ Irene recalled her father as very affectionate, 'by the time he was giving me a good night kiss he had another two or three [children] lined up'.⁶² While it is impossible to generalise from this small sample, interviewees firmly believed that ethnic/religious characteristics affected their parent's personality. Millie Jones described her mother as fun loving and easy going, and thought that was 'the Irish in her', whereas she described her father as a narrow Scot.⁶³

Most country families, even close-knit families, did not encourage communication or intimacy. Interviewees described affection as understated, and confidences were not encouraged. Jean Bevan came from a close and warm family but commented, 'families didn't talk to each other - mothers and daughters and fathers and sons - like they do today. When adults came [to visit] children were sent outside to play'.⁶⁴ Jean could talk to her father, although he seldom said much - 'Dad was a listener not a talker' - but her mother usually had little time to spare.⁶⁵ It is noticeable that in more prosperous families, especially families with small numbers of children, more intimate relationships between parents and children

⁵⁸ K.McNeil, 18.5.95, p.3.

⁵⁹Edna and her mother shared the duties of housework and bringing up the younger children. Edna Partridge, 22.3.95, p.41. Frances Denniston also shared household duties with her mother and on alternate weeks one did the cooking and the other the cleaning. Frances Denniston, hand-written abstracts.

⁶⁰ Nevertheless, unusually for a country father, he tucked her into bed at night, and either read to her or made up stories for her. When she grew older and developed her own views their relationship deteriorated. M.Walker, 20.10.94, p.8, 27.1.95, p.19, 18.1.95, p.16, p.15.

⁶¹ K.McNeil, 18.5.95, p.4, J.Brosnihan, 14.11.94, p.17.

⁶² I.Keehan, 21.4.95, p.6.

⁶³ M.Jones, 17.9.96, p.19.

⁶⁴ J.Bevan, 14.6.96, p.15.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

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emerged. In contrast, in the large families of the time, parents seldom gave children much individual attention, except in times of illness. Families were not child-centred, and especially in poorer families and on small family farms, family roles revolved around survival. Children dealt with the emotional distance from parents by compensating in other ways. They developed closer relationships with siblings, relations, or gave affection to animals.⁶⁶

Many rural interviewees thought that their parents showed favouritism to youngest or eldest children and favoured boys over girls. The Walkers indulged Marjorie because she was the youngest child and also had a tendency to be sickly. Mr Walker expected his older children to give Marjorie anything she wanted, which affected her relationships with her brother and sister. They regarded her as a 'sook'. 'Molly and I used to have a few physical fights, at times, we used to hold each other by the shoulder and push each other'.⁶⁷ Conversely Mary Trembath explained that her grandmother sent better presents to Kathleen, who was the eldest girl. 'She would get a good doll and I would get a rag doll, I'm the second one, not so important'.⁶⁸ Older children, however, had greater workloads, especially in large families. Toynbee found that parents exploited elder daughters and elder sons, which she argued illustrated 'the degree of control exercised by parents over children in general'.⁶⁹ The older Ford children were expected to work hard around the farm, but their younger brother 'did nothing, he was the pet'. A hierarchical system by age existed in his family. Jack tipped his younger brother out of the dobbin (a small home-made cart) one day when he was supposed to be looking after him. 'I knew he was the pet, I'd get stuck into him, give him a hiding, we used to fight quite a lot, my elder brother used to fight me, so I'd then fight the younger one to take it out on him'.⁷⁰

Although jealousies and tensions existed between siblings, for children in large families sibling relationships could be as important as relationships with parents. Often an older brother or sister acted as a parent. Edna described herself as a junior mother to her younger brothers and sisters.⁷¹ The relationship of an elder sister or brother as a junior parent could be positive, or it could be resented by younger children who questioned their elder's authority. Mavis Benson resented having to look after her younger brothers and sisters and seems to have been rather autocratic. Her younger sister used to exclaim 'you're not the boss of me'.⁷² And as Jack Ford's recollection made clear, older brothers (or sisters) could be

⁶⁶Some country children also had imaginary friends. Marjorie Walker, for example, had a series of imaginary families. I actually remember insisting on places being set at the table for some of my imaginary people and mother went along with that'. M.Walker, 7.12.94, p.11.

⁶⁷ M. Walker, 20.10.94, p.6.

⁶⁸ M.Trembath, 2.1.97, p.8.

⁶⁹ Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.127.

⁷⁰ J. Ford, 21.3.95, p.15.

⁷¹ E.Partridge, 22.3.95, p.41.

⁷² M.Benson, hand-written autobiography, also interviews.

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violent and unpleasant to their younger siblings. If children were close in age they could form very close relationships. Jean Bevan and her sister, despite the tensions of jealousy, were close friends and later worked together in a hotel in Timaru. Jean asked her sister for advice after she agreed to marry Eric Robinson. 'I think sisters were more inclined to talk about it together than mother and daughter for the simple reason that our mothers were never told anything either'.⁷³

The chapter on urban childhood used the quality of sex education as an example of the limited intimacy that existed even in small modern families. Silence prevailed to an even greater extent in the countryside, illustrating the greater emotional distance in many rural families. The following example of sexual ignorance derives from an Irish Catholic family. The Irish directed their Puritanism toward sexuality rather than alcohol, and this may have intensified the awkwardness about sexuality, but this example is not inconsistent with stories from other interviewees. Irene Keehan did not know about reproduction until she was about eighteen. 'I know Mum wasn't there one morning and I said to Dad, "Where's Mum". "She's gone to get a baby". "Where?" I was sixteen and he said, "Down under the cabbages". I said "I'm going down to have a look".⁷⁴ Country girls were also ignorant about menstruation. When Irene went to a convent at the age of sixteen, she commented:

Do you know I hadn't used a diaper. Mum had made beautiful cotton ones with my name on, put them in a pink drawstring bag, never told me what they're for. And I didn't know what they were for. [In] the bathroom we had to go through to get to the toilet every night I saw some of the girls washing these things out and I used to go and get mine and wash them out in the bathroom . . . they were put in the wash every day, the nuns never asked me. I come home in the school holidays Mum said to me "Have you used those". I said "What are they for," so she gave me a note and I had to go down to the chemist and I opened the note up and she had Blords? iron pills - just started on a few of those and my first period came, don't remember it, no shock or anything like.⁷⁵

The Anglican Trembaths were slightly more explicit about sexuality but Mary still found it difficult to talk to her mother. She brushed Mary's hair each night and once when she was pregnant Mary felt the baby kick. 'Mum said "Do you know where they come from Mary", and I said "I think they come from heaven".' She realised that her mother carried the baby inside her but felt too embarrassed to say so.⁷⁶ A few respondents indicated that they learnt

⁷³ J.Bevan, 14.6.96, p.15.

⁷⁴ I.Keehan, 21.4.95, p.4.

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ Mrs Trembath explained to her daughters about menstruation after her eldest daughter had her first period. 'We asked "Even the queen?", and she said "Even the Queen does".' Mary felt a sense of pride and achievement when she had her first period. M. Trembath, 2.1.97, p.9. Apparently a younger sister came home and had a baby the next day, Mrs Trembath was shocked but brought the baby up as her own until her daughter married.

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about sexuality by observing the animals on the farm. Edna Partridge, for example, commented 'it [sex] was in front of us all the time on the farms'.⁷⁷ However, not all country children were as observant, and many could not make the connection between animals and people, growing up ignorant and embarrassed about sexuality.

An equal ignorance about sexuality prevailed in country and town, but whereas country children seem to have largely learned from observation, more urban children obtained knowledge from books. Parents left their children largely uninformed but feared that daughter might lapse and as a result were fairly strict. Extra-marital pregnancies were shameful affairs, usually shrouded in secrecy, and causing much gossip in neighbourhoods. Millie Jones knew to avoid farmer's sons because they might take advantage of labourer's daughters. 'I don't know where I knew it from but I knew my father was a working man in Dunsandel - you didn't go out with the farmer's sons or you'd finish up like Alice Foster or Annie Wright'.⁷⁸ Avoiding scandal could be difficult in country areas where 'busybodies' counted the months from marriage to a child's birth. Jean Bevan's sister had to get married, much to her mother's dismay. 'Then when the baby was born it turned out to be cerebral palsy. Well you know some so-called friend of my mother's said "Oh well it was a punishment," - Catholic lady.'⁷⁹

III

Rural parents wielded considerable moral control over their children, and most backed up that control with corporal punishment. The rule that children should be seen and not heard was applied strictly in the countryside. Other studies suggest that authoritarian values dominated traditional families. Thompson's study of British Edwardian families claimed that parental authority made an extensive use of corporal punishment unnecessary.⁸⁰ Toynbee, studying families in the New Zealand context, also argues that parents' authority remained largely unquestioned.⁸¹ These interviews support the view that children seldom questioned their parents' authority, especially when they were younger, but corporal punishment did appear to be used extensively, especially by some parents. The extensive use of corporal punishment probably reflects the stresses inherent in the rural family pattern, as delineated in the previous chapter. The after-effects of war experiences, financial pressures, combined with the often unrelenting drudgery of life on a farm or as a labourer, may have created a sense of anger that appeared periodically in dealing with children. Puritanism, as Chapman suggests, reinforced the sense of discipline and control, and may have increased intolerance to

Family story which did not emerge in the taped interview.

⁷⁷ E. Partridge, 1.3.95, p.28

⁷⁸ M. Jones, 10.9.96, p.12.

⁷⁹ Jean Bevan, 14.6.96, p.14.

⁸⁰ Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p.45. Obedience was stressed among Elizabeth Roberts' interviewees in Lancashire, *A Woman's Place*, pp. 11-13.

⁸¹ Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.172.

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disobedience.⁸²

The Christian tradition, in particular the Puritan tradition, appears to have dominated parents' attitudes to discipline and child-rearing. Parents and grandparents punished children for a range of small sins that included dishonesty, swearing, failure to perform chores and wasting time, but disobedience was the most common crime. These rural families enforced obedience with greater harshness than the urban sample. Values were based around the ten commandments with 'Honour thy father and mother' viewed as the most important requirement. Even if parents were not overtly religious (and some families were very devout) they agreed that God sanctioned parental authority.⁸³ A New Zealand literary critic, Robert Chapman, argued that the evangelical tradition; with its emphasis on sin, its celebration of work and denigration of pleasure, established the basic New Zealand social pattern by the twentieth century. He thought that Puritanism shaped people's lives but that few New Zealanders' were deeply religious.⁸⁴ Many New Zealand historians have agreed with Chapman that religion did not play a major part in people's lives, but evidence in this study does not wholly support this conclusion. A more balanced attitude towards religion seems essential, one that places religion close to the centre, rather than on the periphery of New Zealand society. The Puritan code perhaps existed independently of the churches but many of the country parents in this study, especially women, were deeply religious. Church played an important part in people's lives, spiritually as well as socially. Parents sent their children to Sunday school and attempted to teach them Christian values.

Parents inculcated their children with the values of charity, neighbourliness, and respect for authority. These were Christian values but also formed an essential part of rural life, where survival often depended on mutual aid (see chapter IX). Children were expected to perform errands without receiving payment.⁸⁵ Millie Jones's mother expressed a common concern when she taught her daughter to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. Country people fed swaggers regularly and looked after neighbours. Millie recalled her mother feeding swaggers, 'and we kids were always sent out with a billy for the swagger's blessing'.⁸⁶ Parents expected children to be polite to their elders. Millie commented humorously that their old grandfather used to come for Sunday dinner 'and he would bang off

⁸²Robert Chapman, 'Fiction and the Social Pattern Some implications of recent N.Z. writing', *Landfall*, Vol. 7, no.1, March 1953, pp.35-41.

⁸³Churches emphasised the importance of obedience. For example H.R. Jackson, a historian of religion, quotes one nineteenth century bishop as stressing that the parent had the same relationship to their child as God had to humanity 'and if the authority of the earthly father be not, that of the heavenly father cannot be enforced'. This strict approach softened in the interwar years but churches still promoted obedience. H.R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand 1860-1930*, Allen & Unwin NZ Ltd., New Zealand, 1987, p.159, quoted in Goodyear, 'Black Boots and Pinafores', p.315.

⁸⁴Chapman, 'Fiction and The Social Pattern', pp.35-36.

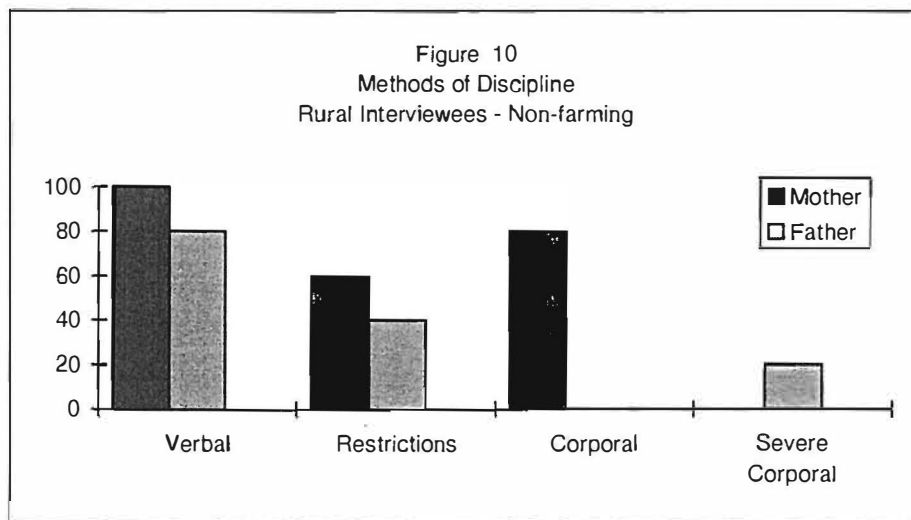
⁸⁵J.Brosnihan, 5.9.94, p.3.

⁸⁶M.Jones, 17.9.96, p.20, 10.9.96, p.15.

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and we were never allowed to laugh'.⁸⁷

Country families expected their children to follow these values but some standards of behaviour appeared more relaxed in country areas, perhaps reflecting the masculinity of country life. The same restrictions about swearing that operated in cities did not seem as well established in the countryside. The respectable working class man, as personified by Mr Anderson, would have been shocked by a man swearing in front of women and children. Swearing had a much clearer class distinction in cities and helped to distinguish between the rough and respectable working class. But Mr Jones regularly swore at his wife and children. He used profanity to shock and frighten them. Millie commented that when he became senile she was the only one that could deal with him, 'because I had worked in a factory and I could swear back'.⁸⁸ For many country males swearing implied manliness. Jack Ford thought 'girls were too sissy to swear' and commented 'we were quite bad at swearing, even at school, and my father swore a lot and do you know, [laughs] cos the horses didn't understand him unless you swore at them.'⁸⁹



Figures 10 and 11 show how the parents of rural interviewees disciplined children, and enforced these standards of behaviour.⁹⁰ Although country parents used a variety of disciplinary methods, corporal punishment dominated to a larger extent than in the urban sample. Some parents smacked their children rarely but a majority used corporal punishment frequently. Again, mothers punished children more frequently than fathers, reflecting their greater interaction with their children. But rural men appear to have punished children more frequently than urban fathers (the exception being severe corporal punishment which was greater in the urban sample), who took a lesser part in controlling their children. Mavis

⁸⁷ibid, 10.9.96, p.12.

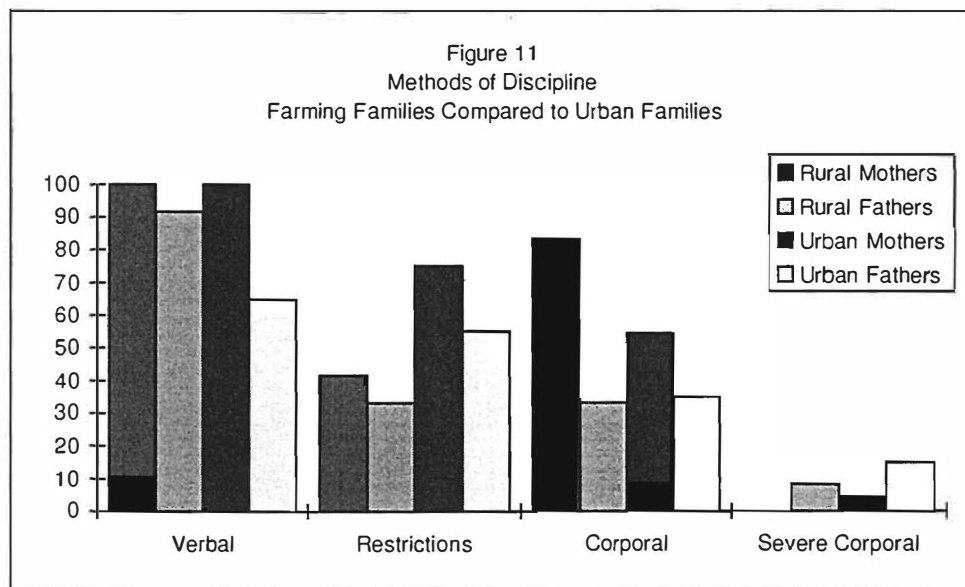
⁸⁸ ibid.

⁸⁹ J.Ford, 21.3.95, p.18.

⁹⁰This information reflects the sample of interviewees only and is not intended to be statistically accurate. It does, however, appear to be consistent with both fictional and autobiographical writing from the period.

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Benson, who had an unhappy relationship with her father, recalled the day he gave her 'the hiding of my life, just because I gave Mum cheek'. He hit her with the strap until her mother said 'that's enough'.⁹¹ She remained terrified of her father until she was well into her forties. Parents held considerable moral and physical authority, which few children seriously attempted to challenge. Rebellious children suffered accordingly, while others, such as Mary Trembath, tried to keep out of trouble. She commented that children could have a good childhood if 'you don't rile him [father] if you can help it, you sort of keep away from getting him angry and don't fight against him and have to have him hit you'.⁹²



The impression gained from the small British rural sample is that discipline appears somewhat different from New Zealand. Equally firm standards of discipline occurred but the use of corporal punishment did not appear as widespread.⁹³ British mothers, like New Zealand mothers, took a more active role in controlling their children. Fred Pawsey commented that spare the rod and spoil the child dominated in his home, but his mother administered the punishments. 'There was love, affection, discipline, control, high standards of behaviour'. Their father never touched them 'but my mother was good with her strong right hand, if you misbehaved you were given a smack'.⁹⁴

⁹¹ M. Benson, 24.6.95, p.6.

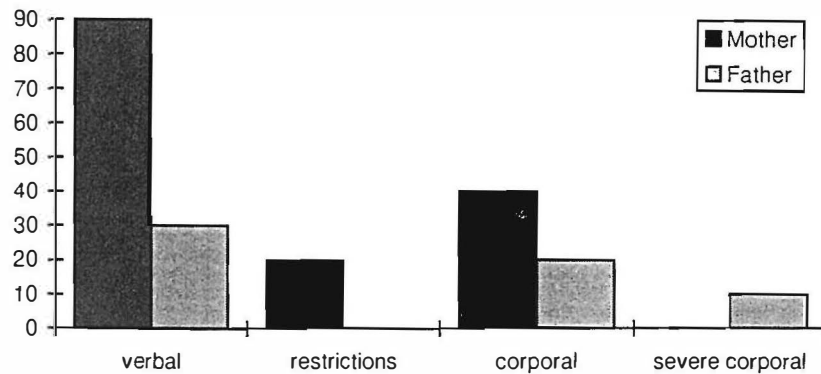
⁹² M. Trembath, 2.1.97, p.11.

⁹³ Although the British sample is quite small, it seems to correlate to Thompson's findings about discipline in *The Edwardians*.

⁹⁴ Fred Pawsey, 12.2.96, p.3.

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Figure 12
Methods of Discipline
British Sample



New Zealand rural parents usually inflicted corporal punishment with either the palm of the hand, a stick, razor strop or belt, but a few used horses' harnesses. Mr Ford hit his children with a piece of horse harness two foot long, a quarter of an inch thick and half an inch wide. Jack recalled his father punishing them if they 'played up' at night instead of going to sleep.

That was desperate because he was a big man and quite a strict bloke, and very strong. He would give us a couple of cracks over the ear . That would settle us down for the night. Oh he'd usually bring the strap with him and you'd get a strap across the behind and with your pyjamas on it wasn't too good. Always had a strap and we got it and we deserved it.⁹⁵

Interviewees expressed an ambivalence about parent's use of punishment that seldom emerged when they talked about being punished at school. They readily condemned schoolteachers' brutality but found it more difficult to criticise their own parents. Jack gleefully described how boys at his school had stolen into the school house and cut up the teacher's strap, an act that reveals considerable anger against abuse by teachers. Relationships with loved parents were more complicated, and most children reconciled their feelings of hurt and frustration at being hit by accepting it as just punishment. Interviewees would have agreed with Jack's statement 'we always deserved it', but submerged emotions of hurt and anger occasionally emerged in interviewees. Mary Trembath swore on one occasion and her mother said 'I'll get you tonight, my dear'. She thought her mother had forgotten but that night her mother pulled back the blankets and gave her a hiding 'with a good twitch'. Obviously she felt some residual resentment about this occasion, because she explained that she did not treat her own children this way. 'I didn't want to peel back the bedclothing and

⁹⁵ J.Ford, 4.10.94, p.6.

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hammer them, because I was very fond of my kids'.⁹⁶

Members of the extended family also punished children. Grandmothers were significant figures in children's lives and two country children were partly brought up by their grandmothers. The forms of punishment that they used belonged to an earlier era, and would have horrified psychologists. The Chapman family lived with grandparents for three years. Although Anna loved her grandmother she recalled her as rather stern. 'She was of German extraction, German Scottish mixture, well there was no nonsense about her, and with those steely grey eyes of hers she looked at us, and she knew we'd been up to mischief'. She punished children severely. 'I remember being locked in the cupboard under the stairs when I was a little girl, for punishment. I was absolutely petrified of spiders and it was dark. I hated it.'⁹⁷ This punishment has a Victorian quality, and is curiously reminiscent of the punishment that Mrs Reed inflicted on Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. None of the parents in this study ever inflicted these punishments so it appears that child discipline had changed. One gains the impression that attitudes to punishment varied between generations of parents, and younger parents did not use corporal punishment as extensively.

Modern ideas gradually downplayed the importance of obedience so one must conclude that it formed part of an older style of family life. Certainly in large families insistence on obedience must have been a necessity. It depended too on the maintenance of a certain distance between parent and child, a situation replicated with school child and teacher. Toynebee comments that 'distance was effected through minimal display of overt affection, reducing children's chances to push their luck, and talk confined to the business of running the farm and/or household'.⁹⁸ Once the parent becomes more of a friend they found it difficult to maintain authoritarianism. The following extract reveals another method of insuring rigid obedience, regardless of the child's feelings. Jean Moss once refused to eat her porridge:

Mum dished the porridge up in the morning and I wouldn't eat it. She said "If you don't eat it for your breakfast you'll get it for your dinner". I thought - "Oh she wouldn't do that". You know dinner time come and I got a plate of cold porridge put in front of me. I wouldn't eat it, so tea time come and I got a plate of cold porridge put in front of me. By that time I took a mouthful of it - once I started to eat it she took it away and gave me my proper meal, but I got the porridge three times a day. I didn't do it again.⁹⁹

Fewer class or gender differences emerge in attitudes to discipline in the countryside. Uniformity prevailed. All classes were strict and corporal punishment was all-pervasive.

⁹⁶ M.Trembath, 31.12.96, p.4.

⁹⁷ A.Chapman, 12.12.94, p.2.

⁹⁸ Toynebee, *Her Work and His*, p.174.

⁹⁹ J.Moss, 24.7.94, p.19.

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Two exceptions existed: Nan Buchanan and Annette Golding were seldom smacked. Nan came from a wealthy family where servants looked after the children, while psychological theories influenced Annette's mother.¹⁰⁰ While this uniformity existed, severe and frequent corporal punishment seems to have been more common among poor and struggling families. Toynbee observed that the 'strictest fathers were found among those who had to struggle hard to make ends meet'. She maintains however, that in farming families where patriarchy dominated, 'the heaviness of father's hand was felt only in extreme situations (unless a quirk of personality resulted in a scapegoat type of relationship with one child only)'.¹⁰¹ Evidence from this study supports these arguments but the heaviness of the father's hand occurred more frequently than Toynbee suggests. Some fathers, in particular, imposed excessive and unnecessary punishment on their children. Such acts went beyond discipline and expressed anger and frustration. Edna Partridge's parents worked extremely hard and struggled to survive on their small dairy farm. She commented, 'If Dad got in a rage, heaven help the handiest one. Unfortunately since I was the biggest I was often the handiest'. She dreaded these occasions since he might cuff her ears, strap, or even kick her. He punished her for reading instead of working, or for questioning commands. 'I used to get many a cuff on the ear for questioning the reason for it, what I had to do, or why I had to do it then.'¹⁰²

Gender differences in the exercise of discipline appear more obvious in urban areas. Both parents disciplined children in the country, and fathers strapped or hit girls, an event that occurred far less frequently in towns. Mothers still emerge as the chief disciplinarians, however, because they spent more time with their children.¹⁰³ The impression emerges that in general country parents imposed more rigorous discipline on their children than urban parents.

Country parents were reluctant to relinquish control over children, and authoritarianism continued until children's marriage, and sometimes beyond. Concern about extra-marital pregnancies partly explains their strictness with daughters, but country parents maintained strict control over both sons and daughters well into adulthood. The following table shows the extent of family control over children's lives. Less than half of the rural children chose their own careers, and many still had to work for their parents. Farming parents often expected daughters to stay home and help their mother, or to help with farm chores. Boys worked on farms. Parents seldom paid their children and most sons and daughters received their keep and perhaps some spending money when they went to town. Marjorie Walker's brother had worked on the farm all his life, with the expectation of eventually taking it over. When the family walked off the farm 'he was 23 and had never

¹⁰⁰ These theories almost uniformly opposed the use of corporal punishment (see chapter IV).

¹⁰¹ Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.173.

¹⁰² E.Partridge, 7.2.95, pp.19-21.

¹⁰³ For example, Millie Jones described her mother as the chief disciplinarian and explained that her father never hit the children, M.Jones, 17.9.96, p.20.

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worked anywhere else'. Afterwards he worked as a farm labourer, eventually marrying the boss's daughter and becoming a farmer in his own right.¹⁰⁴

Table 9 :Rural Families: Family control, schooling and careers

Name	education	job choice	career parents choice	career own
Women				
Moss m	primary	helped sister cinema worker	yes	yes
Brosnihan s	sec	at home, music teach.	yes	
Walker m	teachers coll.	teacher	mother's	partly
Partridge m	sec, 2 yrs	at home, dressmaker	yes sewing	chose
Chapman m	sec	farmer's wife at home, farmer's wife	yes	
Buchanan m	priv. school-17	voluntary work farmer's wife	yes, mother's	
Benson m	primary	at home	yes	later worked
Keehan m	sec	servant	yes	
Evans m	sec	clerical work shop worker	partly	partly yes
Golding s	teachers coll.	teacher	mother's	
Bevan m	tech.	servant, shop ass. married couple on farm	yes (poverty)	
Jones m	tech	servant factory worker	father's	yes no
Trembath m	primary	at home/farm married couple on farm	yes	
Denniston m	primary	at home	yes	
E.G.	sec	at home	partly	partly
Men				
Williams (urb.)	sec	clerk minister	father's	own own
Ford	tech.	motor mechanic		
Gillespie	sec, 2 terms	post office clerk	mother's?	
Ryan	private R.C.hs.	on farm government service	father's	own
McNeil	tech, 1 yr	farmer	father's	

Children, particularly daughters, sometimes had little choice about their future, and parents sometimes chose one child, usually a daughter, to look after them in their old age. Toynbee observes that 'the invidious practice of binding daughters to their natal families until they were no longer required' was associated with patriarchy.¹⁰⁵ Edna Partridge described how school and home conflicted in her family. A young and idealistic teacher arrived in Rangiora when Edna started standard VI, and he introduced new educational ideas, including I.Q. testing. Two Education Department officials visited the Partridges because Edna had scored very highly in the test, so 'they'd come out to have a look at this country kid'. Her parents, especially her mother, reacted with dismay. 'Her attitude was never the same to me

¹⁰⁴ M.Walker, 20.10.94, p.4.

¹⁰⁵Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.123.

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again I can't quite tell you, I can't explain it but she certainly hadn't wanted a clever daughter, a clever son might have been different, I don't know'. Her mother reluctantly allowed her to go to the local high school but Edna left at the age of 14, 'by then there must have been another baby in sight so I went home', to help with the milking and the younger children. 'Like a lot of other young women in those days you had your home but you didn't get much cash, the daughter didn't anyway'. One gains the impression that her parents greatly resented any outside interference since they regarded their daughter as a family resource.¹⁰⁶ Edna thought her mother intended her 'to stay at home and help look after the younger children until they grew up and then continue to look after my parents in their old age, I'm sure that was my role'. Her mother was furious when Edna left to get married at the age of twenty-two, and the resulting bitterness soured her relationships with the entire family.¹⁰⁷ Some young women never escaped from the family and all their lives remained a family resource rather than a person in their own right. The Brosnihan daughters, who lived on a 400 acre farm in South Canterbury, all left school to work in the house until they married. Joan trained as a music teacher but lived at home all her life and looked after her parents until their death.¹⁰⁸

While parents' rather autocratic disposal of their children's lives occurred in urban areas as well as the countryside, these attitudes emerged far more strongly in rural families. This occurred because rural families were more authoritarian, and parents needed their children's labour in the countryside, whereas urban working-class parents usually needed their children's wages more than they needed their labour. Middle class girls often found to their dismay that there was nothing to do at home so they either worked or went into further training. None of the urban girls in this study simply stayed at home to help mother. Most rural children, however, received some secondary education, which shows an increasing emphasis on the importance of education in rural areas.¹⁰⁹

Fewer occupational opportunities existed for rural children, especially girls, who were more likely to go into service than town girls. This occupational choice partly reflects a lack of opportunity, but many country parents also thought that domestic work provided respectable employment and would teach girls useful skills. Mr Jones thought 'that a girl should go into service when she left school', and encouraged two daughters to be servants. Jean worked as a servant for a few years, but Millie only lasted thirteen months, 'that's a hard

¹⁰⁶ Toynbee notes that 'parents who demanded a great deal of children were not necessarily deliberately training them for future life . . . These findings are consistent with patriarchal households of past time, and with the idea of child as chattel'. Toynbee, *Her Work and His*, p.177.

¹⁰⁷ E.Partridge, 7.2.95, p.23, 19.10.94, p.8, 7.2.95, p.21, 19.10.94, p.3. Edna won a scholarship to Christchurch Girls' High School, but her mother did not want her to become a boarder and grudgingly allowed her to go to Rangiora District High School.

¹⁰⁸ J.Brosnihan, 5.9.94, p.2. Joan's father was Irish and arrived in New Zealand in the 1880s, but her mother Margaret was born near Timaru. Joan, born in 1914, was the youngest and the other five children were born in the early 1900s. Joan went to high school in Waimate and learnt music.

¹⁰⁹ Hussey notes an increasing appreciation of education in his two rural villages in the interwar period. See Hussey, 'We Rubbed Along All Right'.

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life, I gave that away as soon as I was old enough to look after myself and live on my own'.¹¹⁰

An English oral historian, Steve Hussey, notes that in Britain parents feared the crudity of factory culture and the possibility of sexual indiscretions. In domestic service the employer would hopefully be able to exercise benevolent parental control over young women.¹¹¹ Rural girls in England and New Zealand may have faced similar pressures to enter domestic service. Although domestic service declined as a major occupation for English women in the interwar years country girls still went into service in large numbers. Hussey observed that for 'young women leaving school in Naphill and Steeple Bumstead between the wars domestic service still provided the most common occupation'.¹¹² Betty Stephens from Kent and Madeline Smith from East Anglia, both country girls, went into service after they left school, although both managed to find better occupations later.¹¹³ Madeline recalled: 'There was general talk about what [could] she do when she had reached 14. "She can't go into a factory we don't want a factory girl." I mean you looked down on factory girls', so she went into service instead.¹¹⁴

Parents with small struggling farms appear to have exercised most control over their children's careers. The Trembaths, Partridges, and Ryans (all dairy farmers) needed their children's labour so all the children worked at home unpaid. Parents maintained authority and deference well after children had left home. The Fords (mixed farming), Bevans (mixed farming and dairying) needed children's labour but could not afford to keep their children at home. Older children went to work as soon as they could leave school. A typical pattern emerges in the Ford family. The older children had to leave home as soon as possible to make room for the younger ones, but they still gave some money to their parents. Bill, the eldest son, went straight from primary school to work in his grandparents' bakery. Eric left primary school and was apprenticed to a motor mechanic, but the younger children had some secondary schooling. Jack and Leonard had two years at technical college, then Jack managed to get a motor apprenticeship and Leonard worked as a cowman gardener for the Elworthys at their sheep station. Winifred had some secondary schooling then worked as a maid for the Palmer-Chapmans.¹¹⁵

Some rural mothers encouraged their daughters to gain an education which would enable them to overcome the lack of opportunities in the countryside. Marjorie Walker trained as a teacher and her sister trained as a nurse.¹¹⁶ These were seen as steady, reliable and suitable occupations for young women. The depression may have encouraged rural

¹¹⁰ M.Jones, 17.9.96, p.19, 6.9.96, p.7.

¹¹¹ Hussey, 'We Rubbed Along All Right', p.146.

¹¹² In the Wycombe rural district 1,261 out of 2,801 women were in domestic service in 1921. Hussey, 'We Rubbed Along All Right', p.141.

¹¹³ See interviews with Madeline Smith and Betty Stephens.

¹¹⁴ M.Smith, 12.2.96, p.3.

¹¹⁵ Jack Ford, 4.10.94, p.2.

¹¹⁶ See interviews with Marjorie Walker.

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parents to become more interested in vocational training for their children. Mrs Golding encouraged Annette to train as a teacher because 'she thought teaching was a good safe job that would pay well' and provide a government pension on retirement.¹¹⁷ Thomas Ryan went into the civil service for similar reasons.¹¹⁸ However, it was unusual for parents on small farms to encourage their children to be independent if they needed their children's labour. School guidance councillors or teachers were more active in urban areas, and helped to provide another source of vocational choice for children.

The dominant patterns of family life in the countryside are best illustrated by individual case studies. These reveal how income and occupation profoundly shaped children's lives in the countryside. Examples from England provide parallels and contrasts.

IV

Upper class family life in the country: The Buchanans

Nan's childhood experiences were different from even the most prosperous urban interviewees. Her early life involved considerable privilege, which she recalled with a deep sense of shame in later life. It was a life similar to, but never approximating that of, the English gentry.¹¹⁹ Her grandfather was the son of George Rutherford, one of the great run holders and estate owners in Canterbury. Nan's mother, Olive Rutherford, married a dentist but he died in 1907. Four years later, she remarried, to John Buchanan. She had a son and daughter by her first marriage and two daughters, Helen and Annie (Nan), from her second marriage. The family lived at Kinloch, a homestead with 1000 acres, on Banks Peninsula in Canterbury, which was part of a larger estate that the two Buchanan brothers sold to the government for over £120,000 in 1906. John Buchanan had a stud farm and his most famous horse, Martian, was premier thoroughbred sire of Australasia for six years. George Rutherford had left Olive a sheep station, Highpeak. The income from Buchanan and Rutherford land enabled the family to live comfortably. They had at least five servants: a cook, a laundress, (possibly a maid) a nanny, a chauffeur and a cowman/gardener, plus grooms for the horses.¹²⁰

Helen and Nan slept with their nurse in a night nursery, and they had a day nursery as well. As they grew older they slept in the night nursery by themselves. Both girls were very fond of their nurse, Jean Muir. Mrs Buchanan rented a house in town when the girls were old enough to go to school. The house in Peterborough Street had a cook, and a minder to look after the children. Nan thought the minder 'very dull and prim' and explained 'that was why I

¹¹⁷ A.Golding, 18.5.95, p.7.

¹¹⁸ He said 'It was my father that seen to it that I got an application in for a job in the public service because in those days if you got a job in the public service you were made for life. It's a fact, my life's proved that'. T.Ryan, 28.3.95, p.8.

¹¹⁹ See the description of Lady Violet Brandon and Grace Fulford in *The Edwardians*. The Buchanan family did not maintain such strong social distinctions but the family moved in its own social milieu.

¹²⁰ N.Buchanan, 4.11.94, pp.1-3.

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was so dull and ordinary'.¹²¹ They preferred the countryside where they had more freedom and were able to associate with the neighbouring children. Her parents went on trips overseas, a tradition which her mother continued after John Buchanan died in 1927. When the girls were 11 or 12 they were sent away to boarding school. After her father died her mother thought Nan looked 'peaky' and took her to England where they lived in a series of hotels. At one point Nan contracted measles and her mother looked after her 'which must have been very awful for mother'.¹²² A substantial emotional and physical distance emerges in Nan's relationship with her parents. The girls developed a closer relationship with their mother after living with her in town, but one gains the impression that looking after her children became something of an imposition.

In both New Zealand and England this lack of contact with children seems to have resulted in similar sorts of relationships with parents. Whether children loved or hated servants or boarding school, they formed significant relationships outside their home environment. Maurice Finbow, an English interviewee, could not - or would not - remember much detail about his childhood apart from his much-loved boarding school. He commented 'I cannot honestly say I had a full relationship with my mother and father'.¹²³ Nan's childhood was an unusual one for a New Zealand child but forms part of the larger pattern of children being brought up by people other than their parents.¹²⁴

Middle class family life

Farming: Anna Chapman

The Chapmans lived near Kurow in North Otago, in a fairly remote area similar to the Hakataramea. John Chapman, the son of a successful Scots farmer, had married against his father's will and left the family farm to try dairy farming in the North Island.¹²⁵ They found dairy farming difficult and in 1921 the family moved back to the Chapman farm at Westmere.¹²⁶ They remained there for three years before John's father gave him a 1200 acre farm.

Their farm house had electricity, hot and cold water, a bathroom and seems typical of a middle class farming family. Somerset might have appreciated the trappings of culture: the piano and organ in the sitting room, the numerous books, gramophone records, and the paintings on the wall by Mrs Chapman's sisters. Mrs Chapman and her children contributed to the family economy, but did not have an onerous amount of work since Mr Chapman employed a ploughman and a boy to milk the cows, while Mrs Chapman had extra help

¹²¹ *ibid*, p.5.

¹²² *ibid*, 16.12.94, p.7.

¹²³ See interview with Maurice Finbow, 12.2.96, pp.1-2.

¹²⁴ Servants, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and boarding school teachers developed parent-style relationships with children. See chapter IV.

¹²⁵ A.Chapman, 12.12.94, p.1.

¹²⁶ See Chapter IX for a discussion of patriarchal control and kinship.

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during shearing.¹²⁷ The children had freedom to play and enjoy themselves and did not have to spend much time in household chores. They fed the hens, gathered eggs, separated milk, and made their own beds and helped with the dishes.

The Chapmans were a close-knit and very strong family. Anna explained 'it was really a very happy family together, we made friends of our family more than we did of outsiders'.¹²⁸ Though affectionate, the parents kept a tight control on their children and were particularly strict with their daughters. Again the influence of the Puritan tradition emerges. Mrs Chapman had been brought up in the Methodist church but became Presbyterian because there was no Methodist church near their home. Anna explained that she regulated their behaviour strictly: they had to play simple card games, and they were only supposed to play sacred music on the piano. Their father supported their mother but did not share her devout convictions; 'we always knew it - the way children know things instinctively, Dad went to church with mother and he became an elder and he was secretary of the church, or treasurer because it pleased mother, but mother's form of church going and worship was a different story altogether'. Anna explained that she kept her church affiliation but moved away from her mother's narrow sense of morality¹²⁹

Sheep farmers tended to be more prosperous than dairy farmers and although times were hard during the Depression, the family remained fairly prosperous. Anna commented, 'I'm glad I went through that depression because we learnt a tremendous amount, how to make do, how to live on very little, how to turn round and be economical'. When older, Anna's brother who went to boarding school helped on the farm in his school holidays. Anna went to high school but had to leave after two years, although she begged to stay there. The Chapmans intended Anna to help her mother and learn to be a lady, and Anna married a farmer at the age of twenty.¹³⁰

Non-farming: Annette Golding

Annette grew up in a modern family, masculinist rather than patriarchal. Her mother took charge over her upbringing. Her parents gave her great affection and attention since she was an only child. Mrs Golding followed up-to-date child-rearing practices, carefully looking after Annette's diet and health. She encouraged Annette to eat plenty of vegetables, and made her junket, ovaltine and custard to eat, as she did not like drinking milk. The Goldings were careful not to spoil their daughter and tried to teach her to be responsible and careful with money. They expected Annette to help around the house but always paid her for chores. She earned her brownie uniform: 'there was three pence for every time you might do something big

¹²⁷ A.Chapman, 12.12.94, p.6.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, p.5.

¹²⁹ *ibid*, 15.12.94, p.9.

¹³⁰ Tragedy struck and Anna's brother developed consumption; his mother nursed him devotedly but both died of consumption when Anna was about 22.

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and penny every time you did the dishes'.¹³¹ This seems very different from a farming family where parents expected children to work as part of the family unit. Here the child was a child.

Her mother encouraged her to take up hobbies and Annette learnt dancing and wrote letters to the children's page of *The Sun* newspaper (the correspondents were known as Sunbeams). Lady Gay, the children's correspondent (actually Esther Glen, a well-known New Zealand author of children's books) asked Annette to be a representative of all the Sunbeams in Rangiora to welcome Sir Kingsford Smith, when he landed in 1934. 'Well the delight was I was rewarded for that, I went up in the Southern Cross for a twenty minute spin'.¹³²

Annette had a good relationship with both her parents. Her father was gentle and loving and had a good sense of fun, and her description of their relationship is very far from the awed distance that many country children remembered. As a single child in a reasonably prosperous family she received many benefits that other country children lacked. She described her childhood as being happy and secure, commenting that she has always been able to give love to others because of it.¹³³

Small farm life: The Trembaths

Mr Trembath balloted a small farm on the edge of the Hauraki plains in 1912. The farm proved too small and the family obtained a second pioneering farm in 1917, which they gradually broke in. It eventually supported thirty cows, which the family handmilked. The family lived a fairly precarious existence for a few years, but Mr Trembath had bought the farm debt-free and was able to survive the Depression. Mrs Trembath and her six children worked hard although the children did not begin milking till they were thirteen or fourteen.

The children helped to bring each other up. They spent all day in the hills on Saturdays or holidays, and both mothers and children must have dreaded wet weather. The children lit fires, boiled eggs, and ate picnic lunches. If they had to carry the babies and toddlers they made a little wigwam in the bush and put them to sleep. On one occasion a small sister rolled down the bank but fortunately she landed in the ferns and was unhurt. 'If we didn't have babies with us we ran and jumped over all the tussock and stuff and had our legs all scraped and sore and came home in time for milking'.¹³⁴

Both parents were strict. Their mother showed affection but Mary described her father 'as stern, no I wouldn't say he was affectionate'. He enjoyed teasing them, but the children hated it. 'We weren't allowed to howl, we were big boobies, we had to take all that and deal with it'. Their parents kept a firm control over the children. The children could not see *The Truth* because it had murders in it, and never had to chance to go into town by themselves or

¹³¹ A.Golding, 16.5.95, p.2.

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ *ibid.*, 18.5.95, p.12.

¹³⁴ M.Trembath, 31.12.96, p.2.



The old house at Dunsandel in the background. Millie is on the old horse. Courtesy of Millie Jones.



Bill Gillespie with his brother and sister on their horses on the way to school. Courtesy of Bill Gillespie.

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meet 'undesirable' people. Mary thought they were 'almost like monastery people, we really lived in the country as country people'.¹³⁵

Mary got her proficiency at 15 and left school. She stayed at home to work on the farm, then left home when she married. She started milking cows when 'Mum had a big operation and she couldn't go into the shed any more and I took her place'. She described the process of milking:

I could fill a kerosene tin in very short measure between me knees. . . You had your tin tilted slightly and looked into it and the froth rose up all on it - then you stripped it [udder] clean, stripped it, stripped it clean and then got yourself back and then took that leg rope off and lifted the chain - the board that holds the door - and let that cow out. Then the next one stepped in here, and then you took that tinfoil and tipped it up into the big vat there, then you got down on the next one, and by the time the vat was three parts full somebody was by that time turning the handle on the separator. By the time the last cows were done, several people had had a go at the separator. Yeah, that was how you milked them, handmilked cows. *What did you wear to milk the cows, did you ever wear trousers?* Yes I did, I wore those jeans that you had, blue denims they used to have in those days.¹³⁶

Many aspects of this family life were repeated in the Ford, Ryan, Bevan and Partridge families. Parents maintained firm control over their children, but were so busy that children were quite independent and had to care for younger brothers and sisters. Strictness and an authoritarian atmosphere prevailed in the home.

Working Class family life

Farming: The Gillespies

Mr Gillespie worked as a shepherd on a station up the remote Hakataramea valley in South Canterbury from 1928. In 1936 he became a station manager on a farm near Balfour in Southland, which brought a considerable rise in pay and social status. As head shepherd he received a pound a week, a house, plus food but the salary was raised to four pounds a week and a house at Balfour. This rise in pay allowed him to pay for Bill's secondary education. Bill spent most of his childhood in the remote Hakataramea Valley. Hot windy summers and freezing winters shaped his childhood. The valley often had snow lying on the ground in winter, and frost that often reached forty degrees below. They lived in a three bedroom house with a sitting room and kitchen, which was lit by kerosene lamps, and heated by the coal range. They had an outside toilet. A later house had a bathroom but had been built with green timber that shrank and had gaps, so only scrim and wallpaper kept the cold out. 'The winders used to rattle in the northwesterns, and howling nor'westerns up there'. There were

¹³⁵ M.Trembath, 31.12.96, p.5.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

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days when their mother would not let them ride to school because the wind blew down trees. On one occasion the children and horse were blown over on the way to school.¹³⁷

Although most country children had an arduous journey to school, on horseback, by foot, over rivers, his accounts of their journeys were the worst. They had eight miles to travel. The school closed in July because of the extreme cold, but even so the journeys to school were grim.

Your hands would be frozen and you would go to grip on the reins and if you had tried to change your hands over sometimes you couldn't grip the reins because you couldn't close your hands enough to grip the reins'. . . [When I got to school] as I hit the ground I had to probably drop a couple of feet to the ground, and my legs would be frozen and I'd hit the ground and a pain would go shooting right through my whole body and I would stand there howling, fingers were too frozen to undo the girth and take the bridle off. So the other kids that were there would come and unsaddle the horse.¹³⁸

Despite their hardships they lived in a close-knit and affectionate family. The children had chores to do but no farm work and had a much easier life than many farming children.

Non-farming: The Bensons

Mr Benson was an unskilled labourer and had great difficulty finding work in the 1920s and early 1930s. Mavis explained that he worked at any honest employment (and possibly implies at some questionable employment as well). As a result the family moved around the West Coast living in various rented houses or rooms, and existed on the edge of poverty. When he could only get work for three days a week, they had barely enough money to survive on and Mavis thought her mother starved herself. 'I knew it was hard on Mum, because she used to cry softly'.

The family lived in Nelson with his wife's parents till 1924 (Mavis was five) and then moved to Greymouth for a while before shifting to Cobden, where they shared a house with an elderly widow. 'There always seemed to be arguments; my mother could not have been very well as she used to lie about a lot, and I was left to 'mind' my small brother who was a real handful'.¹³⁹ In 1927 they moved to Runanga, where Mr Benson worked on the gold dredges. Mavis had to leave school after the birth of a fourth baby in late 1929. 'That was where my life changed completely. Because my mother's health hadn't picked up I was to be 'mother' to the three smaller children'. By this time her father worked on the dredges and they lived in one-and two-roomed miner's shacks. Mavis was bitterly unhappy. 'Dad had my nose to the grindstone. He was not popular with his workmates or the other family folk. I was the slave - he was the slave driver.' As well as cooking and helping with the younger

¹³⁷ B.Gillespie, 7.12.94, p.3.

¹³⁸ *ibid*, p.5.

¹³⁹ M.Benson, handwritten account, also interview.

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ones she cut fallen trees for firewood, sawed them, then had to 'carry and stack them near the hut'. She carried water from the creek in kerosene tins, and cooked over the open fire. Mr Benson moved to Oamaru, then Waimate in search of work, then the family fortunes improved after 1938 when they moved to Christchurch.

In families such as the Bensons, survival dominated. Not all parents were as harsh as Mr Benson, but poverty and poor health bedevilled many families, straining family relationships. Such stories mock the idea that the countryside provided a healthier environment for children. Poverty existed in countryside and town, but isolation in the countryside could worsen the situation. Ultimately in whatever community, country or town, families could cut off ties and choose to be isolated from others. The Bensons at least had neighbours and relations: Mavis recalled her happiness when she spent six months with her grandparents in 1929. The Rylances in Dunedin had an unhappier childhood because of their almost complete isolation from kin in New Zealand. The following discussions of rural life in Britain reveal some parallels with New Zealand, but also reveal greater contrasts of rich and poor, which affected children's lives.

English comparisons

It proved difficult to make any comprehensive comparison between English and New Zealand rural life, but Mary McGonagle in County Donegal, Ireland and Fred Pawsey in Suffolk, England, experienced a childhood with some parallels to New Zealand. Gwen Jones, from a small mining village in Wales, and Madeline Smith, the daughter of an itinerant labourer in East Anglia, experienced far more deprived childhoods. Their lives provide contrast.

Labouring and small farming life in Suffolk: Fred Pawsey

Mr Pawsey started life as an agricultural labourer, but managed to establish a market gardening business with about seven acres of land in the village of Alfeton, near Bury St Edmonds, in Suffolk.¹⁴⁰ Fred recalled that his father 'worked all the hours that God made', to achieve this goal, and his mother also took in washing for people like the parson; 'my sister and I would carry it, go and fetch it in a linen basket one hand one each and taking it back when it was done'. Fred was the oldest boy in a family of four. He described his home as a nuclear household where both parents worked hard but had a clear division of responsibilities. 'My father's responsibilities were outside and my mother's responsibilities were in the house, but when my mother once was ill, my father - I can remember cooked the meal - but it was unusual. I always remember he cooked far more than I could eat'.

The Pawseys were strict but affectionate with their children. Fred commented that his parents encouraged him to get an education. Although the children had to work, the Pawseys, perhaps unusually, did not sacrifice their children's education to the family economy. When

¹⁴⁰ He saved money from his wages of 27/6 a week, and his wife's money for washing, and managed to buy enough land to become independent.

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Mr Pawsey fell ill Fred had to do his work. He fed the pigs by himself 'and I was only about seven or eight but I never thought it was unusual'. They were encouraged to learn 'and even bribed by the fact if you learnt your six times table you were given a ha'penny to go and buy some sweets.'¹⁴¹ The grim poverty highlighted the importance of escaping the village. Fred recalled a row of hovels in Paradise row, which his father described as unfit for pigs, 'they were unbelievable'. Despite the strong class divisions the parents in the village defended their children if they thought they were unfairly treated. 'I think my mother once went to the school because I think one of my brothers had been smacked around the head'. This emphasis on education succeeded and Fred went into the airforce as a cadet, distinguished himself in the war and became a teacher.

A small-holding family in Ireland: Mary McGonagle

Mary McGonagle grew up in a small-holding family in County Donegal. She was born in 1917, but her mother died of puerperal fever after giving birth to a son in 1918 'so I was - taken by an aunt, who had no children.' Another aunt, who had a few children, took the baby boy. 'My father lived alone after my mother died. And I - I was very fond of him.' He died when she was ten. She seemed fond of her aunt and uncle, who were also small holders, and called her aunt 'Muggy' (for Mum). They were very kind to her. Her uncle had bad arthritis and paid men to work for him. 'How he got by, I'm not sure. He sold cattle, you know, and my aunt did a bit of knitting as usual, and the eggs'. Mary helped with household work, and the animals, 'seeing to the cows, because they grazed on - land which wasn't fenced in you see, or could be dangerous, there were cliffs sort of over the lake'. After school she took the cows home and 'later on when I was older, helped to milk them.'¹⁴² She won a scholarship to secondary school and was schooled till the age of 16 and then became a nurse. There seemed distinctive parallels with New Zealand small farmers although Mary described a degree of kinship in the village where she lived that seldom existed in New Zealand.

Working class life, a mining town in South Wales: Gwen Jones

A similar deep kinship existed in South Wales. Gwen Jones, the eldest of three children, was born in 1919, in the village of Crumlin. She grew up with family all around her, though her grandmother and an unmarried aunt in a neighbouring village were the most influential relatives. In the village of six hundred every one knew each other, and in contrast to Alfeton, no strong sense of deference existed between classes. There were the factory owners and the foremen and the workers. An emphasis on education was a distinctive characteristic of their Welsh culture, and the village celebrated scholarship children who had escaped the hard grind of the pit. The dominant feature of the village, however, was the mine.

¹⁴¹ F.Pawsey, 12.2.96, pp.3,4.

¹⁴² M.McGonagle, courtesy of Paul Thompson's Archive, Oxford.

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Most families worked for the mine, except for the doctor, the parson, the school teacher and the small shop and hotel owners. Gwen recalled their dread in school when the hooter went off, as they thought about who could have been killed.¹⁴³

Gwen described the grinding poverty of her childhood, the sense of being hungry, and the helplessness. The whole community feared the workhouse, with its threat of separation from family and degradation. Gwen's father worked for the mine but ill health meant that he spent some of the time out of work. When he was out of work the family went hungry. He was amateur snooker champion in Wales, and Gwen commented 'the thing I could never understand was how he couldn't work because he felt so ill but he could find the energy to do that [snooker] and as I grew older and grew more critical of him . . . As I got to ten or eleven then my father and I grew apart and never grew together again'. She resented his autocratic and selfish ways, and the demands he made on her mother. Her mother said that Gwen mothered one small brother 'because my father was very ill at the time when my younger brother was born he was in bed upstairs.'¹⁴⁴ The Jones did not seem to have a happy marriage and after the family migrated to London in 1936, Mrs Jones returned to be with her kinfolk.

Unlike Fred or Mary, Gwen did not have any outside work to do, but like many other young girls, she acted as a second mother and a junior housekeeper. When her mother helped the neighbours she left Gwen in charge. 'She would say now take care of your brothers until I come back and you are not to leave the house'. She told the children not to play with the fire but they loved putting potatoes in the oven to bake 'we used to call it 'aving a free feast'. If they denied it when their mother returned she became upset - 'telling fibs was the worst thing you could do. Oh dear your legs used to get a wallop then and you used to be sent upstairs to bed.' Mr Jones had little contact with his children and never punished them. 'I don't think my mother would have 'ad it anyway. She could do it. If you didn't toe the line you got punished, physically punished, but she gave you a lot of rope before it came to that, so probably you deserved it.'¹⁴⁵

An itinerant childhood in East Anglia: Madeline Smith

Madeline endured a harsh childhood in East Anglia. Her mother became pregnant after a wartime affair with an 'officer and a gentleman', who was later killed. A married and childless sister promised to adopt Madeline, but died in the influenza epidemic of 1918 so Madeline grew up with her grandmother to the age of three and a half. In 1921 her aunt's husband (who considered himself her father) returned to collect Madeline:

My father by then had sorted himself out and came down to Deal wanting his child. I can remember

¹⁴³ G.Jones, 18.11.96, pp.4-5.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.5.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*.

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him coming too. . . I was under that table when I saw this man come in, all I saw was his brown boots, and buskins? and I can remember Granny Jordan saying "You must come out you must come out, come and meet your father", looking at his boots and no way, no way was I coming out. . . I was taken to a woman [Gertie] he had met for sole purpose of giving me a mother. . . I see all this and think of all this as happening to somebody else, this is not me, this is all happening to somebody else, "this is your mother", "that's not my mother, she's not my mother," no I wouldn't kiss her'.¹⁴⁶

Madeline found the transition devastating, and never established a happy relationship with her adoptive parents. Her father could not find steady work and the small family lived with his wife's mother, a washerwoman, and then a widow. The family moved around and Madeline's adoptive father abused wife and child. They were isolated from the communities they lived in because of their mobility and sense of separation. Madeline recalled feeling a deep sense of shame about being beaten, and tried to hide the bruises on her skin. When her father at last found steady work driving a traction engine, her childhood became more stable. At fourteen Madeline, despite her obvious intelligence, had to leave school and went into service. She maintained a fragile relationship with Gertie but was devastated when she discovered that Mr Smith was not her father.¹⁴⁷

Comparisons here between New Zealand and Britain expose deep similarities, although older patriarchal family patterns appear to have dominated to a greater extent in New Zealand. In small farm families in New Zealand, Ireland and England, families worked together as a productive unit, but there appears to have been a greater separation of responsibilities in an English family, such as the Pawseys. Parents in labouring families followed the masculinist patterns although fathers maintained a stronger authoritarian control over their families than seems to have emerged in urban families. In both countries women dominated home and family. What emerges as a significant contrast between New Zealand and Britain was that in the British sample parents encouraged their children to gain an education and a career beyond the farm. A sense of education as escape emerges more strongly, although perhaps these examples were idiosyncratic. Many of the small-farming families in New Zealand maintained a much more autocratic disposition of their children's lives. It seems likely that children played a more integral role in the New Zealand farming economy than they did in Britain. Another major contrast is that no references to new ideas about child-rearing emerge in the British interviews. Older authoritarian ideas predominated. The childhoods of rural labourers in New Zealand and Britain are linked together by poverty, although it can be argued that favourable wages and economic conditions softened the extent of suffering in New Zealand. Mrs Benson starved herself but her children had enough to eat,

¹⁴⁶ Madeline Smith, 12.2.96, p.1.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.2.