Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France

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THE SITUATION IN THE LAW

Legislation between 1790 and 1794 lessened the authority of French husbands over wives, established divorce, and gave children equal inheritance rights. Marriage was henceforth a secular engagement that required ratification by public officials. By those measures the Revolution weakened legal constraints inside families and by doing so struck at an essential root of the nobility. Now equal with commoners before the law, nobles felt even more keenly than them how innovations undermined the ways in which the family head could control his dependents. Female family members had exercised a great deal of initiative in protecting property belonging to French noble émigrés by invoking dotal rights and those of children. Those women had a more independent outlook, as well as a clear title to more assets in their marriage. Nobles had always put the utmost emphasis on preventing individual whims, grievances, or natural rights from upsetting their family's destiny, and the disruptions and innovations of the Revolution were bitterly regretted.

After 1800, hard-pressed patriarchs welcomed Napoleon's return to stern practice, particularly with the 1804 Civil Code, which reaffirmed the senior males' domination of the French family. The family council convoked to deal with disputes had to be composed of six or more males evenly divided to represent the interests of spouses or children in a variety of situations (Articles 405–19, 755, 758, 767). Divorce was made more difficult to accomplish. Like other property owners, nobles generally applauded limiting wifely rights against husbands or those of children against their progenitors. The Chambre introuvable (1815–16), an assembly in which the collective outlook of the petty noblesse was enunciated more clearly than at any time since the calling of the second estate to Versailles in 1789, took another step along the
road to reasserting masculine authority by abolishing divorce completely. Despite these retreats from the Revolutionary enactments, the support accorded in law to the family head was much reduced from that bestowed by the Old Regime.¹

Nowhere was that more evident than in inheritance laws. Essentially the Civil Code upheld the equal inheritance rights of children and in so doing reasserted the death of the system of primogeniture, the droit d’aînesse, which gave the first-born male advantage over his siblings. No longer could nobles by their wills ensure the survival of unified family property in the hands of the senior male heir. Renunciation of a child’s rights could only be achieved by voluntary obedience to family spirit. In publications directed to the nobles it became commonplace to lament the pernicious new laws on inheritance. Although they are hard to appraise, we can at least be sure that these legal novelties did not slow the economic decline of the poorer noble families.

**Noble Attitudes Towards the Family**

Many nobles regretted the Old Regime educational system, and they hoped that henceforth the kindred could sustain an outlook that previously teachers and the very organization of society itself had transmitted to the young. Bonald frequently invoked the necessary triangle of paternal power, maternal authority, and juvenile subjugation: “The child, subject to the action and will of the father and of the mother, has only one duty: to listen and to obey.”² However, when writing on domestic education, Bonald expressed fears of the corruption resulting from disorder in the paternalist hierarchy if servile and feminine influences on the child predominated. “Domestic education,” he wrote,

> is dangerous because children learn or divine from it all that they should be ignorant of; because it puts a child in the midst of women and servants; that if he learns there how to greet people graciously he acquires the habit of trivial thinking; if he is taught how to eat correctly he is molded to unjustified vanity, to pointless curiosity, to be temperamental, to slander, to give a lot of interest to little things, and to pontificate gravely on inconsequentialities.³

Bonald was self-evidently speaking of well-to-do, patriarchal lineages in a rural setting complete with servants. During the nineteenth century that breed remained the yardstick for Catholic writers on the family such as baron de Gérando or baron de Watteville.

The divergence of the condition of the urban and industrial workers from this peasant-noble idyll gave reforming writers on the social question and poverty the confidence to recommend drastic interference in the lives of the city poor. Economic individualism, promiscuity, and
geographical mobility were the scourges of society; the submission to paternal ideology, purity of morals, and love of place were their rural antidote. Comte de Falloux observed of the agricultural profession that "no order . . . is less damaging to the primordial and patriarchal character of the family, grouped behind its chief and meeting every evening around the same hearth. What a difference from the worker and the small artisan, who, in most towns, have hardly room for the domestic hearth."

Bonald’s myriad imitators believed that early noble training should form character before intellect. Instinct and reflex would preserve the child from temptation and sin more easily than would reason. In his customary pious way vicomte de Melun expressed it: "God has attached so much power to family influence that the child cannot completely escape it, even in passing through the wasting fire of the collège." Running through these generalized remarks about the effect of upbringing by kin there was praise but also warning. The mother, representing sensibility and emotion, could not only convey paternal values but also corrupt them by indulgent femininity.

The transmission of family lore and the training of small children in desirable conduct almost invariably were left to women, but the education of noble youths was clearly male work. Vicomtesse de Gontaut was raised to the position of a duchesse in 1826 in recognition of her labors as governess of the duc de Bordeaux. The seven-year-old henceforth studied under male instructors, with the baron de Damas de Cormaillon as his gouverneur, or principal tutor. This distinction between the first six years of life and later was, in practical education, the contrast dear to Bonald between sentiment and reason: women molded instinct, while men trained intellect. The handful of aristocratic ladies who wrote on education themselves subscribed to this instinct/reason dichotomy. Mme de Rémusat’s Essai sur l’éducation des femmes was published in 1824 by the same publisher who had produced Mme Campan’s De l’éducation. Rémusat stressed the importance for women of private and family virtues over public and civic ones: “One must thus regard the status of citizen as the prime purpose of man’s social existence. Woman’s destiny is in turn included in those two titles no less noble, wife and mother of a citizen. . . . Supportive friends of the project of a husband, we cannot act suitably [convenablement] save at his order, and our submission, result of duty and sentiment, contents the heart as much as it does the conscience.”

Women charged with instilling in young children the basic we/they taxonomies of noble attitudes only rarely theorized about their pedagogical aims. That task was more likely to be found in a highly stylized way in the Catholic press during the Restoration—and this was gener-
ally the work of male writers who were often unmarried celibates. Raymond Deniel produced a useful analysis and guide to recurrent themes in his study of images of the family. The female vision of how noble families developed is a great deal more difficult to find. Two accounts by elderly noblewomen of literary bent are especially informative about interpersonal dynamics within the noble family and merit more extended treatment elsewhere. Mme d’Armaillé was a fairly prolific authoress of a variety of feminine noble biographies and came from a highly cultivated and aristocratic family, the Ségurs. She wrote memoirs describing her childhood and her early married life with the comte. Mme de Castelbajac, née Villeneuve, lived in a more constricted and provincial milieu of small nobles in southwestern France. She had encountered Chateaubriand as a girl, and this inspired her to produce in old age an evocation of her family life at the start of the nineteenth century. Both women placed the focus of their memoirs on relationships within the family rather than upon the interminable *politologie* which is usually the matter of the recollections of men who have been involved in public affairs. Of the two the account by Mme de Castelbajac is perhaps the more unusual, since there are other women witnesses to family life among the Parisian aristocracy but fewer sustained descriptions of that of provincial nobles.

Childrearing among nineteenth-century nobles was less sentimental than among bourgeois; at least noblemen frequently made this claim. Tocqueville contrasted the affectionate *douceur* of the American democratic family with the formalism of the French aristocratic family, about whose members he remarked, “Their hearts are rarely on good terms.” The comtesse de Bradi recommended in her 1842 etiquette guide that in a good family the familiar *tu* form of address should never be used. She added that “kissing and other caresses” are demonstrations of affection “disapproved of by *la bonne compagnie*” and that kisses on the cheeks between girls and a single *baise-main* ("hand kiss") from boys are “the only evident marks of tenderness that it is proper to show each other in the family.” Nobles did not like the drift towards the child-centered family which many authors claim began in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1851 comte Lezay-Marnésia praised his Old Regime upbringing in a Jura château (“nothing on either side which resembled tenderness”), comparing it with the “idolatry” shown for children in his old age by (presumably) bourgeois parents. Comte de Rességuiere, born during the Restoration, recounted how his mother went off to Paris three days after his birth, leaving him with a country wet nurse. Eighteen months later he was turned over to a blacksmith and then to a veterinarian's
family for care. Half a century later Rességuiier felt a need to justify this indifference: “This way of bringing up children must seem barbarous to mothers who in our day like so much to play at dolls and trinkets with theirs, and yet there was good in it.” There is, of course, scattered evidence for the opposing view. The baron de Damas’s daughter remembered her father bestowing a morning and evening kiss and making the sign of the cross on her forehead, as well as the southwestern lady praised in the family for affection expressed by breast-feeding all nine of her offspring, although her husband’s straightened finances might suggest that this was motivated as much by thrift as by maternal sentiment.

Perhaps it is artificial to distinguish between the emotional bonds between parents and children and the educational intent of upbringing, but to do so makes plainer how nobles differed from commoners of similar wealth. The nobles wished their children to place family matters before those of sentiment or sexuality. Private custom was more important than public law. There are few adequate sources to inform on the matter: the doctors, ethnographers, and local historians who provided E. L. Shorter with information on different levels of sentiment in France between 1750 and 1900 were less observant about contemporary nobles who stood above them in the social scale. We turn to journalism, noble memoirs, and, most promising of all, correspondence or papers written without any thought of subsequent publication.

The problem with such testimonies to the feelings between parents and child, between husband and wife, and between siblings is that they are usually autobiographical, in a setting where family history was to be exemplary. The improving memoirs of the nineteenth-century nobles were intended to instruct and improve posterity rather than to tell the truth. Comte Lezay-Marnésia spoke of his wife in terms that were perhaps accurate but encourage suspicion that the felicity of his marriage to a girl from a financier family, Marie-Antoinette-Célimène de Laage de Bellefaye, was slightly overstated: “It is now forty-three years that we have been married, and during this long time there was never a single instant of deviating from the perfect accomplishment of all her obligations—religious, social, domestic, charitable—and from her tender care for her husband and children: not one instant that did not make me honor her more and more and cherish her.” A multitude of similar texts make plain the noble convention that any suggestion of marital dissatisfactions should be glossed over in the formal discourse of the memoirs.

Yet there is no shortage of evidence about the absence of family spirit. We find it in an 1827 correspondence between the siblings of a general who presided over the noblesse of the Alençon baillage in 1789, served in
the army throughout the Revolution, and subsequently became mayor of his seigneurial village. One brother wrote to the eldest from Alençon asking for a display of the "frankness and confidence that is owed between family members when they want to live on good terms" and expressing surprise that there had been no consultation on the appor­tionment that was about to take place upon the death of his wife. The other replied that he regretted "the forms and precautions indicated or prescribed by law, which unfortunately take away in family matters on all the mutual occasions that might be found to bend oneself to the particular desire of one's relatives and to seek to give them pleasure. . . . it is my children, not me, who are your coheritors in the rights of their mother."16

Of course, it is less common to encounter family squabbles than more elevated sentiments. However, a case of such animosity was found in the reminiscences of comte Horace de Viel-Castel, a malicious writer of the early 1860s Parisian smart set. He described being sent away by his son and daughter from the deathbed of his estranged wife, ("my wife, with whom I had passed days of peace and more numerous days of storm") so that they might have an opportunity to go through her papers in order to extract the relevant ones, as well as have the apartment lease made over to the young woman. Foiled in his hopes to control his wife's papers, Viel-Castel wrote: "Edouard and Cécile are behaving towards me in a way I can no longer tolerate, they have failed in all their duty, they have lacked heart . . . I shall not see them any more, I cannot be in the presence of children who have slighted me and who have treated me as they have treated me."

In general, the saccharine prevailed in the written and perhaps in the oral accounts of the lineage, as expressed in the prudish atmosphere of the nineteenth century, an age in which correct sentiments were still valued highly. Once nobles desisted from anxious scrutiny of the Civil Code or reading of the loftier flights of Catholic social thought, it remained plain that practical training in noble manners, gesture, symbols, and bearing was primarily a family matter. Titrés for their part sought to emulate the indefinable distinction of bearing and manners, the *je ne sais quoi* that distinguished the *noblesse* and the aristocracy from social inferiors. This was necessary if they were to pass into the *bonne compagnie* just as they needed wealth to enter the Parisian *haute société*. Nineteenth-century nobles and particularly aristocrats found their last redoubt of social power in control of the criteria of elegant behavior. No sooner had an erstwhile M. Jourdain carefully learned the current forms of good manners than his patient mimicry was derided. It was in this sense that Marx scornfully said of the nobility of his time that they had become the dancing masters of Europe. Nevertheless, the
ability to set the tripwires that marked social boundaries was one that inspired healthy respect and fear in the social climbers—that is, the newly successful—in France.

Family memories among the noblesse of the first years of the nineteenth century were marked most vividly by the Revolutionary years, when the second estate's former members found themselves singled out for hatred and suspicion. Recent misfortunes were blended with traditional exaltation of the lineage. Louis de Carné's mother put herself to some trouble to immerse her son in this frame of mind, teaching him to read in a folio-sized history of Brittany produced by Benedictines and pressing a treat upon him each time he came across the name of an ancestor in the text. She made him memorize his genealogy. Noble victims of the Terror provided the habitual topic of evening conversation. In a similar fashion, Horace de Viel-Castel, in his early childhood at Versailles between 1803 and 1804, met elderly survivors of the old court, “escaped from the slaughterers of '93 and who filled the conversation of their last years with the story of monstrous things that they had seen.” A fellow resident in their rented house, the marquis de Valfons, described how he had watched the massacre of the Orléans prisoners from his window and frightened the children to tears with his stories of the dauphin delivered into the hands of the infamous Simon. Adèle d' Astorg, the young comtesse de Choiseul d'Aillecourt, who died in 1818 at a Pyrenean spa, liked to describe her childhood under the Revolution as “the sadness of a spring without smiles.” Another example of this obsession with the Revolution was that of the daughter of major de Marguerye, only eight years old when her father was guillotined in 1794. Fears of the Revolution haunted her, poisoned her marriage, and drove her to mental breakdown; it lay at the root of the publications whose titles speak for themselves: Souffrances (1834), Fleurs de tristesse (1857), and Malheur et sensibilité (1859).

Sometimes the legendary faithful servant might be the purveyor of the family oral history, as in the case of a forty-year veteran with the Rességuier family:

We were still near those dreadful times; the air that one breathed was full of exile, war, or emigration. Everything about this great social upheaval which had shaken everything, where prison, pillage, violence, proscriptions, drowning, and the guillotine had dispersed or decimated families and wiped out fortunes, was constantly on the lips of those who had survived. The children, always drawn towards what moves their emotions, in spite of the fright they felt, were the first to ask for these stories. . . . Dupuy [the servant] was for me the historian of our ruin and of the misfortunes of our family.
These appalling narratives were not entirely without remedy, since the Rességuiers were quite prosperous thanks to their grandmother, who saved from confiscation the bulk of her parlementaire family's property. What mattered was the elaboration of legends of struggle, heroism, and virtue of which nobles were the fulcrum. They were often retouched to edify the young. Long after her father's death, Gobineau's daughter was surprised—and disappointed—to learn that the family patrimony had not been confiscated by the Jacobins as she had always been told but had passed into other hands because of bankruptcy. As in so many other noble households, family “oral history” was not intended to be an accurate chronicle. Rather it was to strengthen that historical consciousness of family considered by the marquis de Bailly in 1826 to be more important than titles, positions, or wealth: “The work of time is necessary to constitute an aristocracy.” A provençal noble journalist repeated the same point under the Second Empire when he said that the solidarity that tied the generations must never be denied and that men should not be isolated from those who had gone before them and those who would follow. Even more than the written texts of noble history it was the family legends that produced the pride of origin and the sense of stigma and apartness from the mass of the nation. Indeed, nobles anchored their historical perceptions on family events as much as on the public and political developments that affected them.

Nobles figuratively at least believed themselves to be descendants of an elite bonded by shared family values. Of course, nineteenth-century nobles married with the same legal aims as did the notables: to give legitimate status to future children, to place women under a husband’s legal tutelage, and to transfer money by dowries from generation to generation. However, these arrangements were subordinated to their social identity which placed them outside society at large. Nobles could only sustain nobility with their own kind.

**OFFSPRING**

Hopes for the continuing prosperity and fame of a bloodline were all dependent on the presence of children. Did nineteenth-century nobles have more children in each marriage than commoners? The first official publication to give precise information on the size and composition of French families appeared in 1906. One study showed that the frequency of marriages differed quite widely from department to department and that from the nineteenth century to the 1950s the trend was one of increasing numbers of marriages but fewer births per couple. Moreover, departments with the largest numbers of unmarried also had the highest fecundity per couple. To my knowledge, however, no nine-
teenth-century demographer attempted to find out whether nobles had more children than other categories of the population. This has been attempted by some twentieth-century historians. A sample from vicomte Révérond reveals that noblesse had, on average, increasingly more children than commoners taking titles over the same time period, but we must bear in mind that these were noblesse sufficiently successful and wealthy to obtain new titles. Yet we know from chapter 1 that the absolute numbers of noble families and the proportion of individuals as a segment of the national population were falling. Obviously it will be necessary to return to the questions of age at marriage, the number of offspring who never married, and the number of married couples who did not produce a son or were infertile.

Evidence from more than a thousand individuals granted titles between 1815 and 1830 and listed by Révérond, as well as those who received a majorat sur demande in the same period, shows that those born noble who married had more children than those born commoners. Mme de Ségur, née Rostopchine, authoress of the famous Sophie stories, for many years produced a child annually: “She lost some, and three sons and four girls remained.” If she is set aside as scarcely typical because of her Russian birth, the feature to be more strongly emphasized among nobles is that pointed to by Houdaille in his excellent study of the descendants of the grands dignitaires of the First Empire (incidentally a study of how nobles were joined by new recruits over time). What seems to be crucial is the trend among noble families who had from zero to three children (increasing in numbers), those with three to five (falling), and those with six and above (increasing).

The families with more babies were in the best position to multiply kinship marriages and thus to receive property transferred in dowries. This should be added to Zeldin’s observation about ducs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: “Thus in 1858 half of French dukes had one or two children; in 1878 two thirds of them had reduced their families to this size but by 1898 they had already reverted to larger families and only 48 percent had one or two children, while in 1938 only 40 percent had that number. In 1938 people with noble titles in general had significantly more children than those without them.”

Those nobles with the largest families were best able to keep systematic linkages running back to the collateral lines, linkages which attached them to wealth and new recruits. For those purposes marriages had to be with nobles, as we see clearly in one distinguished old southern family. The Villeneuve-Bargemont family is best known for a writer on political economy (Jean-Paul-Alban) and for its strong representation in the prefectoral administration under Napoleon and the Restoration, especially Christophe at Marseille from 1815 to 1829, who willed
that his heart should be buried in that city. There was also a strong military tradition, with men at the battles of Montebello and Trafalgar, another lost in the retreat from Moscow, and another present at the siege of Algiers in 1830. Thanks to a highly detailed genealogy, we can trace their demographic contribution and marriage strategies over the first half of the nineteenth century.

At the eighteenth degree a marriage between nobles at Aix-en-Provence in 1770 (Villeneuve-Bargemont/Bausset-Roquefort) produced fourteen children—nine males, of whom six married, all to nobles either once or twice. These married sons begot a total of fifteen girls and six boys. Five females were born to the 1770 marriage, of whom three married: child number 4 to a half-noble (on the groom’s maternal side) and child number 13 to a commoner doctor. If she had issue, this is not recorded in the family genealogy, presumably because it was of no interest. It is true that she had waited until the age of thirty-six to marry. The last girl, number 14, married before her older sister but died without issue, bequeathing her property to a great-nephew. We see that the males of this ancient family remained strictly within the noble marital reserve, but as a counterpart of this endogamy, they were quite open to accommodation with post-Revolutionary regimes, with men fighting for Republic, Empire, the Bourbons, and, in due course, the Second Empire, when the only son of number 9 died, at the siege of Sebastapol in 1855. The women, by conspicuous contrast, did not obey the caveat: two out of the three who married did so with commoners.

It is possible to ask how close was the social proximity of nobles and commoners in the nineteenth century on the basis of the choice of noble or non-noble godparents. Abbé Berthet recorded the decline of the numbers of noble godparents to common children from the sixteenth century to 1789 in the village of Château-Gontier (Jura), but it remains to be investigated whether that shrinkage continued in the nineteenth century at an even faster rate than the demographic decline mentioned above. Although we lack systematic studies, it appears that nobles were no more likely to admit commoners to their baptisms from 1800 to 1870 than under the Old Regime.

THE AVERAGE AGE AT MARRIAGE
The age at which weddings took place is obviously important to any discussion of the number of children born to couples, but it is not easy to ascertain in a socially selective way. One celebrated study of Genevan patrician families, who at first sight might seem quite similar to the nobles in France, showed a steady fall in the age at first marriage of both men and women during the period 1700–1850: from 30.5 and 24.2 years, respectively, at the start of the period to 28.2 and 21.3 at the
However, a family of the nearby Lorraine noblesse with fifty marriages over the same years as the Genevan families showed no consistency or steady trend: the men averaged 27, and the women 21.1, at the start of the period, while at the end males averaged 29, and the women 20.6. A study of the pre-Revolutionary peerage showed that from 1650 to 1789 both men and women were marrying younger, but despite the longer period of fertility for each couple, there was a steadily smaller average completed family size. Descendants of the grands dignitaires of the First Empire, the archetype of the titrés of the nineteenth century, consistently married older than Frenchmen at large (from 29.5 years to 29.8), while their wives gradually came closer to them in years, from 20.7 to 22.2. What typifies the titrés, however, is the wider difference in age than among French couples in general. Tudesq, writing of the wealthy grands notables, who included nobles and commoners, concluded that in family matters the average notable married between the ages of 25 and 35 and had two or three children.

Individuals, of course, do not fit into these majestic trends: of the five Villeneuve-Bargemont men whose first marriage took place between 1801 and 1824, the youngest was aged twenty-nine and the oldest thirty-eight, while the only daughter who married a noble was aged seventeen. An older sister, number 13 in the lineage as mentioned above, had waited until age thirty-six to marry a commoner doctor. Another example was a prince and due de Bauffremont aged thirty when he married a twenty-seven-year-old Neapolitan in 1822; in 1849 his eldest son, at twenty-six, married the seventeen-year-old daughter of a banker. His second son, a general, waited until age thirty-four to marry the twenty-two-year-old comtesse de Caraman-Chimay. Let us cite an example of one of the impecunious younger sons, who could only marry when the family fortunes looked up. The fifty-year-old bachelor brother of the post-Concordat bishop of Limoges had returned to France after a career in the Spanish service, a classic occupation for the cadets of southwestern families. He accompanied his episcopal relative to the newly found financial security of the Limoges diocesis. One bit of good fortune in the family brought another to the retired army officer, as he wrote in a letter to yet another brother:

On the morrow of Easter Day I hope to receive from my brother the nuptial benediction. It will be with Mlle Suzanne de Cardaillac, whom I saw for the first time yesterday in the evening. This demoiselle is thirty-five years old and of a valuable character. She ought to have been a sister of charity, her parents, under the pretext of health, were opposed to carrying out this plan; she has kept all the religious feelings that this vocation had given to her. You see, my dear friend, that this marriage, which is not the result of passion,
suits me well [remplit mes vues]. . . . The demoiselle has nothing, I have very little; as a result we must go along very carefully.\textsuperscript{40}

The couple had a daughter despite the relatively advanced age of the mother. For individuals, such differences, just as much as those of sickness, second marriages, and so forth, had a great deal to do with the number of children in the family. They remind us that in matters of marriage and childbearing aggregate statistics reveal only abstract mathematical truths.

\textbf{FAILURE TO PRODUCE MALE HEIRS; INFERTILITY; ILLEGITIMACY}

The most energetic pursuit of status by a family could ultimately founder on the accidents of reproduction. Here again the particular example tells more than the statistical generalization. The Pastorets exemplified the upwardly mobile legal profession of the eighteenth century, moving from Marseille to northern France in the person of Claude-Emmanuel-Joseph-Pierre, who became a judge in the Paris Cour des aides before 1789 and a Seine deputy at the Conseil des Cinq-Cents under the Directory, taking his first title (chevalier) within months of the establishment of Napoleonic titles, and in 1810 became a comte. Meanwhile he had become a senator, which led in due course to a peerage (June 1814) which letters patent of 20 December 1817 made into a hereditary marquis-peer. A little historical veneer was added to this avid collecting of distinctions by letters patent of 11 September 1818 which recognized the family’s descent from a family with noblesse since 1298, the motto “Bonus semper et fidelis,” and the war cry “France! France!” (Révérénd sourly observed that the Pastorets were “an old family in the Marseille bourgeoisie” but had never proved nobility in Provence before 1789.)

Beyond the normal satisfaction at such a collection of distinctions, Pierre Pastoret was presumably thinking of his sons, Amédée-David (1791–1857) and Maurice (1798–1817). The former married the daughter of a robe noble colleague among the maître des requêtes in 1815 and soon thereafter became a commissaire du roi près la Commission du sceau, which permitted him to ensure that all was in order with the documentation naming his father-in-law, A. S. Alexandre de Neufermeil (1756–1839), comte in 1819. Amédée-David expired a senator of the Second Empire, but his only son, born in 1819, died young. His only daughter married the marquis de Plessis Bellière, a cavalry officer. Maurice, the younger brother, died in 1817. Despite assiduous practice of the attitudes recommended by Sam Rayburn’s dictum “To get along, go along,” the name Pastoret disappeared from the nobility in the century in which it emerged.\textsuperscript{41}
An even wealthier member of the legal profession was the marquis E. J. F. C. d’Aligre (1770–1847), perhaps the richest noble in all France at mid-century. If he had the partial satisfaction of having his name added by law to that of his grandson on the female side (marquis de Pomereu [1813–89], he also lacked a son to carry on his lineage. Pomereu had no male descendent.

Childless weddings were not uncommon: of 1,082 Restoration ennoblements who were married 172, or 17.6 percent of those born common and 13.8 percent of those born noble, produced no children. Sometimes whole lineages seemed to be touched by celibacy and sterility, as in the case of the military family of the Le Lièvre de la Grange, at the twelfth degree in the nineteenth century. An Old Regime noble who became a baron and comte of Napoleon and a hereditary marquis under the Restoration had two sons and three daughters. However, one daughter never married, and neither sons nor daughters had children.

In a poorer family of country noblesse not able to take new honors, baron F. J. E. R. Blay de Gaix married at age twenty-two a nineteen-year-old bride from a family in his neighborhood in December 1800: they were blessed with a son two years later, followed by four daughters before the mother’s death in 1820. The son died a bachelor of fifty-four, and the eldest daughter stayed a spinster, but the three younger sisters contracted marriages in the local nobility. The name of the family in that branch became extinct.

The desire for a male heir to carry a name—combined with the wish to retain family wealth—seems a likely explanation of the marriage at age fifty-two of M. d’Albon to his brother’s eldest daughter. The senior d’Albon had married a commoner in 1830 without issue, the second d’Albon had two daughters, and at that stage uncle and niece embraced their responsibilities for perpetuating their family name. They had two sons.

Another solution for nobles without a male heir was adoption or the legalized transfer of their name to some other man. Unlike the feudal practice of Japanese Samurai adoptions, according to which the male simply changed his own surname to that of his bride’s family, in France it was attached by particle to the family name of the ingested male, who might in due course prefer the new name to the old. Among those who set up a majorat sur demande during the Restoration it was specified that the title might pass in the case of no heredity to grandsons, nephews (the most frequent with nine out of the eighteen specifications), sons-in-law, brother-in-law, husband of a niece, or an adopted son from the first marriage of a twice-wedded wife. Among many examples found in Révèrend are Semonville, whose name passed to his grandson by his only daughter (1825); and the comte de Goubert,
whose title was given to S. M. O. Bernard in 1846 and then was confirmed as reverting to a nephew in 1864, letters patent in 1866, with the title Forestier de Goubert. Twenty years after his death in 1843 the bachelor Fleurigny’s name was legally taken on by his grandnephew and universal inheritor, Raigecourt. Régnault Saint-Jean d’Angély’s comtal title was passed to the husband of his adopted daughter in 1870, although it was not confirmed because of the fall of the Second Empire. These examples suffice to illustrate the range of possible ways to keep alive a family name, but they were never numerous enough to reverse the steady demographic decline discussed in chapter 1.

We have seen how nobles ranging from the newest and brashest recruits such as the Pastorets to ancient knightly families such as the Le Lièvre de la Granges stumbled over the same obstacle as that identified among the pre-Revolutionary nobility of Forez, where half the ennobled families disappeared within each century more because of a lack of male posterity than because of poverty.\(^{44}\) Possibly what eighteenth-century moralists called the “dread secrets”—birth control practices—so notorious among the court nobility of that century were less used in a devoutly Catholic century. As yet we do not have a detailed study of disruptions in the post-Revolutionary noble family to match investigations of the breakdown of marital life in common under the Old Regime.\(^{45}\) Nobles chastened and affected by the religious revival possibly did not forget in their bedrooms the earnest strictures of the interminable sermons of the early nineteenth century. At a less explicit level there may have been among the women of those age cohorts fertile between 1800 and 1825, as well as their husbands, a desire for larger families, a need felt to extend and multiply the family links menaced and destroyed by the Revolution. Demure prudery makes it difficult for us to know how often couples discussed matters so vital to their lives. Only a dim echo of intimate conversations can be found, carefully filtered into generalizations, in articles in the Catholic press.

Genealogies record the majestic grandeur of family trees for unborn posterity; they rarely record wind-blown falls. Bachelor uncles and adolescent boys were assumed, although not expected, to find sexual satisfaction with women servants, whose dependent situation made them easy prey. Alphonse de Lamartine fathered his first illegitimate child by a servant girl at sixteen, while still at school, and his second a little later by the wife of a noble friend, who remained unaware of the infant’s real paternity.\(^{46}\) If unmarried servants were impregnated, they might, if lucky, be supported, or they might be sent packing. One recent study, however, claimed a decline in master-servant sexual contact during the nineteenth century as a result of the new family prudery and unity among the middle class and suggests that this was compensated
by widespread recourse to prostitutes. Perhaps the same could be said for nobles. Married women also might engage in affairs but were not permitted the same license across class barriers, despite vaudeville pleasantries about handsome young footmen, for fear that the servant might forget his station. Once married, on the other hand, nobles made acceptable lovers. This was commonly thought to be the situation before the Revolution, but in the nineteenth century there was more hypocrisy about such matters. The historian is left to wonder about the significance of scraps of information about bastards.

One prominent ultraroyalist publicist fathered an illegitimate daughter at age sixty-two and in his will made his two legal daughters each responsible for half of the annual payment of 6,000 francs, to be paid in quarterly installments. He died in 1829, and by 1861 his illegitimate daughter, married to a Haute-Vienne landowner since 1842, had received some 192,000 francs in payments. Invoking the Civil Code in selling off their testamentary obligation, the comtesse de Choiseul and the marquise de Crillon together paid 121,500 francs to be invested in 3 percent government bonds inalienable in their half-sister's name as part of her dowry secured in her marriage contract by the régime dotal. Herbouville's daughter had thus been exceptionally well provided for by her father.

What motivated the generosity of this sizable legacy by a noble lady of Paris in 1838, some twenty-three years after the presence of many Englishmen in the capital?

I leave to John Piper, a young Englishman whom I have brought up and who is in my service since his childhood, 30,000 francs. I wish, for his advantage, if however his intention was to remain in France, that the amount of this legacy might be used by him to buy a furnished hotel business in one of the good quarters of Paris: a speculation that he may be able by order and good conduct to render profitable. By means of my present legacy I recommend to John, in the interest which I have in him, to give up henceforth being a servant.

There was no need to speculate about the reasons for the generosity of comte de Moussy to Mlle Maria Blampois, to whom he left his entire fortune: "I had from Mademoiselle Maria Blampois a male child born 25 January 1850. presented him at the town hall of la Chapelle and recognized [my legal responsibility for the child]. He carries the names of Charles-Alfred-Gustave de Moussy de la Contour . . . done in Paris in perfect sanity 3 February 1850." Such a "recognized" child had the right to one-third of the portion of any legitimate offspring, but those
who had not been legally acknowledged had no rights to their parents' estate.

We cannot easily know if nobles fathered—or mothered—a disproportionate number of illegitimate children in comparison with the general population.\textsuperscript{51} Discretion could usually be purchased. A pregnant maid could be married to a gardener for a consideration at best, or simply shown the door at worst. A child reclaimed in due course from a discreet country wet nurse could be brought up as a servant. Bastards had a more furtive place among nineteenth-century nobles than at earlier times. Only a psychologist could correctly explain the motivations of the comte and general, father of the successful journalist Emile de Girardin, who permitted his adulterine son by a Parisian judge's wife to eat lunch in the gardener's cottage but not under the paternal roof. Only the most exceptional among the illegitimate, such as Morny or Flora Tristan, are remembered as being of noble descent.

KIN AND THE ECONOMICS OF MARRIAGE

Post-Revolutionary nobles generally subscribed to the view that love or passion that overcame common sense was bad. The same could be said for insistent libido in general. Persistent homosexuality or a desire to marry one's social inferior, just as much as extravagance or excessive religiosity leading to unwanted celibacy on the part of those who had to transmit the family name and wealth, threatened family stability. Weddings were generally arranged. Not only the dowry but also the number, influence, and wealth of the spouse's relatives were prime considerations in any decision on future unions. When J. V. A. de Broglie, a future senator of the Second Empire and member of the Académie française, was engaged in 1845 to Mlle de Gallard de Brassac de Béarn, he scarcely knew her: "This union had not been at first, following French usage, anything other than an affair of convenience discussed between friends and relatives, because I was not known to Mademoiselle de Béarn and I had never myself met her, and I even had some difficulty in obtaining permission for us to see each other two or three times in the houses of mutual friends before becoming engaged to each other."\textsuperscript{52} The notaries of the respective families, however, were certainly on more familiar terms.

All nobles viewed marriage as crucial to their status. Each child was a potential link in a chain of contracts, obligations, and understandings between families. The apparently excessive sentiment of baron Favard de Langlade in his 18\textsuperscript{11} legal manual did not appear in the least overstated to nobles or, indeed, to socially ambitious commoners: "The marriage contract is the most important act of all those that affect civil society; it is not of a purely private interest restricted to those who have
contracted it; the whole social order is interested in it; it is on the faith of the conventions there stipulated that families join themselves together and form new ones; and families are the richness of the State, the source of public prosperity." A bride’s dowry was normally the largest infusion of wealth into the groom’s fortune until he finally entered into his inheritance from both parents.

As the banns were announced for each wedding, the gossips buzzed with speculation about the economic strength not only of the two parties but also of collateral relatives from whom funds might be received in due course. Small wonder that an encyclopedic knowledge of eligible nubile partners and the wealth of their relatives was of paramount interest to older family members. Mme d’Armaille recalled the preliminaries of her 1851 marriage: “The informations on M. d’Armaille were so good, and coincided so completely with those that my parents had gathered from other sides, that they decided to give me in marriage. There was an exchange of notes on our fortune, according to the custom [my emphasis].”

Land and cash were the most important components of dowries, as is illustrated by the 1810 marriage contract between an aristocratic second lieutenant of cavalry, Balbès de Crillon, the son of an Old Regime lieutenant general of the French army, and the daughter of the Rhône prefect and former maréchal de camp, Herbouville. Both families were strikingly wealthy, had good pre-Revolutionary standing, and served the Empire. The groom was promised 400,000F provided equally by his mother and father, and in earnest of this he was given a large Seine-et-Marne estate. (Incidentally, the contract noted that this land belonged to the Crillons as a result of Mme Nolasque de Couvay’s will, dated 1756, just as Herbouville noted of the dotal property they provided that it was a legacy to the bride’s father, “who owns it from his ancestors.” Both were using the marriage contract to emphasize that this was not new—particularly not biens nationaux—property.) The Herbouvilles provided to their daughter 300,000F, with the promise of paying 5 percent annual interest at six-month intervals until the principal was fully paid off. They mortgaged an estate near Dieppe in the Seine-Inferieure. These excellent terms made endogamy congenial to the young couple.

ENDOGAMY AND MARITAL STRATEGIES

With the directness of a soldier, Napoleon I briefly attempted to oversee the arrangement of marriages to encourage the fusion of the pre-1789 noblesse and the notables who had emerged from the Revolutionary and imperial interlude. He ordered prefects to draw up in each department a list of the nubile rich girls over fourteen years of age with whom
matches might be encouraged. This bizarre document has survived in a number of archives at least as much for its curiosity as for anything else. At Le Mans (Sarthe), for example, the list of heiresses, together with the exchange of correspondence following the initial request for information from the general police, that branch of police particularly responsible for public security, health and morals, individual safety, industry, highways, mines, and so forth, have been preserved. An 1810 letter from Paris complained that recent marriages “of public interest” had taken place without information or estimates of the wealth involved being sent to Paris:

These pieces of information are all the more necessary to me, since you must know that the majority of the former families are opposed to our institutions and only seek to form alliances with each other, because they are determined to give life and more brilliance to titles that the government does not recognize and that today are not anything other than the recompense of those who have distinguished themselves in combat or rendered numerous services in the civil career.

These combinations have still for their aim, on the part of these families, to perpetuate among their descendants the spirit of opposition that animates them against the present dynasty. . . . I rely upon you, Sir, to exercise the greatest care to inform me in time of these marriages so that you may receive my orders before their conclusion, if I think it necessary to address any to you. 56

The Sarthe prefect, understandably wishing to avoid the invidious role of busybody in such matters, protested that neither were the local nobles of “so high an extraction as to fix attention” nor were they subversive. In February 1811 the Vaucluse prefect also was being chided for his failure to produce this information. 57 In the troubled conditions of the Empire’s last years this odd policy lapsed.

Noble endogamy was more absolute among provincial noblesse (as has been demonstrated in Normandy) than among those resident in the capital. 58 This may well reflect the greater attraction of Paris for the ambitious and successful. Did sons marry commoner women more often than the reverse? The July 1821 marriage of Auguste-Esprit de Osmont, son of a former trésorier de France, chevalier de Saint Louis, and a landowner member of the Legion of Honor, with the daughter of a Nîmes landowner, Buguet (27,000F cash and more than 400,000F property in due course) was not exceptional. The groom’s witnesses were titled, but while the bride’s side included a banker and two wholesale merchants, close relatives, she also produced a peer, a lieutenant general, and a gentleman of the bedchamber. 59 In the Villeneuve-Bargemont family at the same period all males married nobles in first and second
Particularly from 1835 to 1840 marriages between nobles and commoner Parisian families of equally substantial wealth became more frequent.\textsuperscript{60} This, of course, did not mean that nobles became more bourgeois but rather the reverse. The children of a noble father and commoner mother almost always married nobles. The provinces were more resistant to exogamy, if we can judge from one impression of the Vaucluse under Louis-Philippe that claimed that marriages were always among nobles between "gens à particule," such as the marriages of the daughter of marquis de Forbin des Issarts with comte d'Aveton, Dulaurens d'Oiselay with Scholastique de Crillon-Mahon giving a daughter who married Athénosy, and so forth.\textsuperscript{61}

While we lack a series of regional studies to examine the question on a comparative level, it does seem that under the Second Empire disapproval of marriages between nobles and commoners weakened considerably. Nobles realized that suitable female recruits could be made over into noble ladies. The existence of other elites made some family links with the rich and powerful desirable, and many nobles seemed to accept this. The imperial nobility were among the most active. Louis-Napoléon Suchet, duc d'Albufera, married in 1844 the daughter of a Prussian businessman and incidentally became a brother-in-law to a Choiseul-Praslin; the vicomte de Chambrun wedded the daughter of the deputy owner of the Baccarat glass factory. The ironmaster Benoist d'Azy (whose particle in the surname was approved in the 1840s) saw his son Augustin married in 1859 to the granddaughter of comte Daru of the First Empire (1809) and a peer de France (1819), and the daughter of a hereditary peer who sat from 1833. One of her aunts had married into the Baconnière de Salverte family of the Legitimist noblesse of Fougeres. In 1865 Antonin-Juste-Léon-Marie de Noailles, duc de Mouchy et de Poix, married Anna, princess Murat, daughter of a senator. These randomly noted unions show that when stakes were high, with linkages to the powerful, traditional political loyalties were extremely malleable.\textsuperscript{62}

The marriage of the Schickler girls—rich, foreign, and commoners—to French aristocrats reminds us of the international dimensions of the noble marriage market. Some French noble girls married foreign nobles, especially Belgians and Italians, but also further afield. It is not yet clear whether the balance was the same as the national trend in the twentieth century, when Frenchwomen consistently married more foreigners than did Frenchmen: in 1948 Frenchwomen married 36 foreigners per thousand, while Frenchmen married 25 foreigners per thousand.\textsuperscript{63} However, the links between French nobles and their Brit-
ish, Belgian, Polish, Russian, Austrian, Italian, and German counterparts, while fascinating, cannot be explored here. Exogamy, whether with wealthy Frenchwomen, foreign partners, or others, can only be weighed correctly when following the marriage patterns of those children born to the union. Habitually commoner women were “ingested” into the noblesse in the sense that their children married nobles. The children of titrés were somewhat less likely to marry nobles.

Liquidity available to young couples was generally scant if the parents were still alive, since noble family fortunes were habitually held in real estate. Marriage contracts only spelled out mutual obligations of the spouses and enumerated claims on future inheritances. In one sense the contract changed the credit-worthiness of two individuals and was a crucial step in each generation’s financial progress. At least since Martial’s epigrams on the topic, writers have pointed out that a balance between the social levels of the marriage partners is an excellent thing. Nineteenth-century noble weddings generally took place between families of roughly comparable wealth. A nonpracticing provençal doctor, Antoine de Courtois, made the same point in 1812 when he longed for sufficiently large estates to permit him to set up a hereditary title for his sons: “honorable marriages are the alliance of two respectable [honnêtes] families of equal fortune who in future will make only one.” The need for parity of fortunes—marriage “without disparagement” in the medieval English phrase—to maintain levels of propriety and dignity was keenly felt by nobles. Each wedding concerned their collective reputation as well as the happiness of the newly wed. When Mlle de Mun married comte de Biron in Paris in 1828, “all the relations put themselves to a great deal of trouble; all that was Gontaut and Gontaut-Biron and even the Mun gave evening parties without end.”

An improper marriage which lowered a family’s social tone was collectively disapproved. When marquis de Boissy, a peer of France, married one of Byron’s alleged former Italian mistresses twenty years after the poet’s death, it was considered a regrettable eccentricity. Her first entry into the chancellor’s fashionable salon was marked by an abrupt silence as all eyes in the company turned to the door. “The poor woman seemed at first a bit excluded.” Doubtless humiliated by her reception, Mme de Boissy was nevertheless received. This serves to remind us that the nobles shunned newcomers more frequently in novels than in reality.

Nineteenth-century nobles consolidated their situation by careful management of the patrimony. The courts of Louis xviii, Charles x, and Louis-Philippe were in no sense threadbare, even if they did not compare in magnificence to pre-Revolutionary Versailles. However, with fewer state pensions, aristocrats spent less of their money on conspicuous consumption, particularly now that mere extravagance could be
emulated on an equal footing by rich commoners. Even more caution was displayed by the provincial nobles. No longer able to count on the profits from venal offices or feudal dues, they had to concentrate on the product of their estates. A Mayenne noble described the importance of land for the local gentry when he said of the acceptable dowry, “It ought to be in real estate, for we have little taste for landed or industrial speculations.”

More than ever, wealth was to be amassed by parsimonious management of estates or detailed leases for rents. The noble wife dragged the heavy burden of maintaining a seemly noble establishment, managing household expenses so that demands on family hospitality could be met in a decent way, and ensuring that children were raised correctly. What has been called the economy of makeshifts among the eighteenth-century poor was, with adjustments in scale, appropriate to the middling range of nobles, struggling to maintain appearances with an annual income of less than 5,000F. Lamartine’s mother noted the difficulty of keeping the family purse at the start of the century: “One doesn’t think enough when one marries that it is also a vow of poverty, since one puts her fortune in the hands of her husband, and that one can only dispose of what he allows us to spend.” The Burgundian estate at Milly provided a mere 2,000–3,000F in annual revenue, the threshold of poverty for those who wished to maintain a noble look of things, and Mme Lamartine was obliged to impose rigid restraints on spending.

Noblewomen in fact were often burdened down with financial responsibilities. In the absence of husbands, they often took over estate management, as in the case of the wife of Président d’Aiguesvives, the newly elected deputy from Toulouse, given in 1816 power of attorney so that she could “generally carry out the full management and administration of his goods and properties that [M. d’Aiguesvives] would himself do in person. . . . and he promises to accept all that shall be done by the lady with the procuration.” Joseph de Villèle left estate management in his wife’s hands during his long absences in Paris during the 1820s, and he sought her advice on business affairs.

Thanks to their witnesses and terms, marriage contracts provided a range of information about professional and geographical aspects of marriage patterns and tell us about family status. They are less informative about money. They can be found in full in notarial records or in abbreviated form in departmental archives in the registers of the Enregistrement des actes civils publics or those of the Table alphabétique des contrats de mariage. One extensive search of the former showed that only 1.3 percent of marriage contracts concerned nobles. It is quicker to locate nobles, such as the 1829 judge of the Chartres tribunal de première instance, described as écuyer, in the alphabetical
listings of marriage contracts.\textsuperscript{70} In full or abbreviated form, contracts rarely lend themselves to establishing what was the wealth of the “average” noble couple. This is not merely because prospective claims on family resources varied for reasons as simple as those of the number of girls to be married compared with the number of boys or because of the age and health of the parents at the time of the marriage. It is because the sum of those considerations makes it difficult to find like to compare with like.

If those distinctions are brushed aside in the name of the law of large numbers, a new and forbidding obstacle appears. Numerous contracts never specified the monetary value of property but only the inheritance rights to it. Among a group with extensive family ties as indebted to each other as the nineteenth-century nobility, the contracts were often a Byzantine maze of fractions of estates, farms, or fields and partial claims to payments for loans or shares themselves payable at the death of a third party. Indebtedness stretched over years and could predate the Revolution. The 1763 marriage of Le Bascle d’Argenteuil and Mlle Duban de la Feuillée noted the donation of a piece of land in return for taking on a commitment to pay a rent worth 40,000 livres. By February 1800, when the widow died at Soissons, this rent was worth 39,506 fr. 17, or an annual revenue of $1410F 92, which was to be paid to nine individuals from four families. One claimant owned half of the rente: Anne-Joachim-François de Melun, of a noblesse family, baron of the Empire in 1811, auditeur to the Council of State, and later a member of the guards of Louis xviii and mayor of Brumetz (Aisne). The remaining quarter belonged to the widow de Nicolay and seven further individuals each possessing 3.5 percent. M. d’Argenteuil and Mme de Maillé promised to pay three-fifths and two-fifths, respectively, of the annual interest in those proportions on 1 January and 1 July. In 1838 the comte de Melun received for complete repayment of his annual rente the sum of 14,109F, but the other amounts were presumably still being paid. This seventy-five-year-old obligation in a noble wedding contract from the Old Regime had thus been passed on through nine and perhaps more sets of inheritances.\textsuperscript{71}

Such examples could be multiplied, but to little purpose. The extent of those family financial networks defies any hope of reducing the linkages to a diagram or all-embracing generalization save to say that noble financial arrangements were of stupifying complexity and were mainly secured by land and real estate in the hands of relatives. The social life of elderly nobles was largely taken up with collecting information about the future prospects of families, the debt burdens present and foreseeable, and the number of wealthy old bachelors in the collateral lines. Signature of a marriage contract was fraught with unenvisaged con-
tingencies, the worst being too long-lived relatives and the best, windfall inheritances.

Besides promises of future inheritances of land, many contracts also provided for cash payments. With an annual revenue of 3,000–10,000F, the lesser of which was the threshold of poverty for the modestly secure noblesse, one could rarely expect large cash dowries, despite particularly dazzling hopes for future prospects. Even the most ferocious economies would not permit the accumulation of large capital sums. The middling prosperous nobility—those whose mid-century annual revenue was 10,000–30,000F—would expect more in cash, as in the case of Mogniat de l’Ecluse’s daughter, given on the occasion of her wedding (vendémiaire xiv) 20,000F in silver coins and a house in Lyon worth 130,000F. Interest on this dotal property was to be paid by her husband to her parents.

This arrangement was quite common. A minor only child such as Angélique-Charlotte Celier de Bouville, with a château and estate in Auteuil bringing in an annual return of 135,000F, was a very good catch for M. d’Argent, écuyer, squadron leader in the cavalry, and quartermaster of the royal lodgings, who later in life was to be deputy for the Eure-et-Loire in 1852. The aristocratic 1808 wedding of Rohan-Chabot (who later in life as a widower would take his vows and enter the episcopacy) with the minor Mlle Serent brought on the groom’s side 200,000F, secured on the Moisson forest near Mantes (Seine-et-Oise). His aunt, the widow of M. de la Rochefoucauld, now living on the rue Saint Honoré, made a gift to her nephew which she noted was a proof of her tenderness on the occasion of such a desirable marriage—in the event, 200,000F of her estate, secured on a property near Issoire (Puy-de-Dôme). On the bride’s side came another 200,000F, from property near Château-Chinon (Nièvre), and also a house of which the ownership if not the enjoyment was given to her by M. Giraud with the statement that it would yield a revenue of 8,000F payable from the day of his death. A list of eighteen mirrors in the house was attached to the contract. As the century progressed, weddings of similar aristocrats would involve ever larger dowries.

Only rarely were the amounts of Paris noble dowries matched in the provinces. In a small town like Tarbes in the Hautes-Pyrénées in 1832 the future wife of the wealthiest landowner in the department, marquis de Palaminy, brought 36,000F. In Toulouse, the nearby regional capital, the cash (mobilière) brought by noble girls to marriages increased by 64 percent between 1816–19 and 1862–65—from 64,000F to 95,000F. Over the same period the cash brought by men increased by a lesser amount, 44 percent, from an average of 15,000F to an average of 35,000F. Generally the period 1800–1870 saw a steady rise in the
amounts of dowries: mobilier under 10,000F accounted for 72 percent of the 1810 declarations but only 36 percent of those in the 1860s; conversely, 6 percent exceeded 100,000F in the earlier period but rose to 38 percent in the latter. There was, however, a falter in the steady rise in the amounts of money reported in dowries during the 1840s with the political upheaval and, what was even more important, the agricultural crisis. Contemporaries perceived a connection between the profitability of farming and the family well-being; the subprefect in the Toulousain, for example, lamented the rising “voluntary sterility” caused by increased difficulties in procuring dowry payments. The rise in dowry amounts resumed in the years of the Second Empire.

The above discussion makes plain that the wealth levels of the noblesse, titrés, and aristocrats at marriage varied widely. A later study might plot the trajectories of networks of families in a series of dowries and partages to discover the clusters of wealthy nobles, those of middling fortune, and those who were, relatively speaking, the penurious. Certainly the regional contrast is plain over time. The Crillon-Herbouville marriage in Paris in 1810 involved 700,000F in estates located in northern France. The 1865 Ducos de Saint Barthélemy de Gelas-de Joly marriage in Toulouse involved 100,000F in cash from the bride on the condition that as soon as possible the money would be used to acquire buildings free of mortgages or investing in government or banking bonds, in shares on the French railways, or in municipal bonds on the large French cities, evidently an enumeration of secure investments. The groom’s contribution was an annual revenue of 4,000F secured on half of an estate near Nérac in the Lot-et-Garonne worth perhaps 100,000F. Fifty years separated the contracts in one of which the southern families provided less than a third of the dowry amounts listed in the other by prestigious Parisian families during the First Empire.

The nineteenth-century dotal arrangement considered the norm by the Civil Code, communauté, meant an equal sharing of profit or losses from the management of the joint fortunes, including the dowry. The other favored form was the régime dotal, which entrusted management of dotal funds and property to the husband but specified that neither directly nor indirectly could the dotal property be disposed of by either partner; at death that property had to be passed on to the heirs. A variant form was the séparation des biens, which went further in ensuring the independence of the wife’s property against her husband’s depredations. The 1802 marriage before the implementation of the Civil Code between Destutt de Tracy’s daughter and the son of the marquis de Lafayette specified that there would not be a communauté de biens between them but the husband would be authorized to manage and
administer the present and future property of his wife to be. One of their daughters married a commoner official from the Cour des comptes, another a nobleman who was a conseiller d'État, and a third a noble who was a représentant du peuple—all three marriages rejected the communauté de biens. 79 An examination of several hundred noble marriage contracts over the first half of the nineteenth century showed an increasing preference for régime dotal contracts over those of communauté (see table 10). 80

This was the opposite of the national trend. By the 1860s more than two-thirds of nobles chose forms of the régime dotal (including dotal et acquêts and séparation des biens), although earlier this trend had not been so predominant. Of 106 marriage contracts known for the majorats sur demande (1814–30), 66 percent were communauté, 19.8 percent séparation des biens, and 14.2 percent régime dotal. 81 The nobles’ growing preference in the nineteenth century for the régime dotal is clearly a significant marker in distancing them from the way in which the mass of French commoners organized their weddings. This remained true into the twentieth century. A 1903 study surveyed informants from different parts of France on preference for the régime dotal by the rich and the noble. Bordeaux made the salient comments: “It is among the noblesse that one encounters it the most often to ensure the conservation of a family estate. . . . it is adopted in other circumstances

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**Table 10. Contract Types in 374 Noble Marriages, 1801–1870**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decades</th>
<th>Dotal</th>
<th>Communauté</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1801–10</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1811–20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821–30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N = 9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831–40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 60)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841–50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 39)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1851–60</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 104)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1861–70</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>(N = 130)</td>
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when there might be grounds to suspect that the husband, by hazard­
ous speculation or through habits of exaggerated luxury, might put
the dowry of his spouse in peril."  
82
In saying that nobles in particular liked a form of contract that placed
the wife in a subordinate position to that of her husband but also pro­
tected her independence, it is worth remembering that local fashions
came into the matter. In Normandy the Old Regime custom actually
prohibited communauté. The traditional financial independence of the
woman was summed up in the adage “Dot de femme ne peut périr,” and
this found an echo in practice as late as 1898, when the Seine-In­
férieure still attained 29.19 percent of régime dotal marriage contracts,
at a time when the national average for the form was down to 12.27
percent. 83 Under modern legislation regional traditions in the matter
survived, since almost all former arrangements could be recreated by
availing oneself of loopholes and permitted exceptions under the Civil
Code.

The main reason for the noble preference for the régime dotal was the
wish to keep money and property in the hands of those who had re­
ceived them from their own family, to which in due course it would
revert through inheritance if there were no children. The communauté
could be damaging to the wife’s interests, as the family council acting
for a deranged Breton noble widow in 1819 recognized when it recom­
mended that in view of the bad state of the succession, it would be better
for the widow to renounce in law the communauté that had existed
between her and her husband, a sea captain. 84 The régime dotal was a
significant drag on the speculative instincts of the noble husband and
also hindered the conversion of family property into more liquid forms
which might prove profitable but which could even more easily be lost.
The régime dotal thus not only was a bond of subservience but also gave
independence to women. Both movables (mobilier) and real estate (im­
obilier) were of higher average value in dotal contracts than communauté
save at the top levels of over 150,000F.

NOBLES AND DEATH
During the nineteenth century nobles paid respects to the dead more
emphatically than before the Revolution, and this reflected the rising
religiosity described in chapter 6. This was particularly true after mid­
century. However, the publication of Chateaubriand’s Génie du Chris­
tianisme in 1802 can serve as a symbolic marker of this nineteenth­
century insistence on death and salvation in a way almost reminiscent
of the fervid seventeenth-century Catholicism, although occurring in a
vastly different intellectual climate of rationalism and positivism. To
make a good death—which is to say a pious and proper one—was a
central preoccupation of elderly nobles. The elements of this were constant: the condition in which life ended, ideally with a priest to administer the sacraments and with grieving relations in attendance to testify to its meaning to the family; the proclamation of the death by announcements (faire-part, printed on cards or heavy bond paper sheets with a statement of the time and place of the funeral) and printed obituaries in suitable publications read by nobles and notables alike; the funeral itself, with public procession, Mass, and burial; family echoes in the form of the tomb and inscriptions, and memorial Masses to be said subsequently.

Since the work of Philippe Ariès and Michel Vovelle, historians have examined these and other aspects of the French way of death, but it can fairly be said that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been less studied than the fifteenth to the eighteenth. Moreover, the emphasis has fallen on defining what was typical in regional rituals of death rather than the contrasts by social categories. Albeit in a preliminary and cautious way, some tentative suggestions can be gleaned from a group of ninety noble wills drawn up between 1800 and 1870, as well as from newspapers, books of costume, and correspondence. In particular we can see how the element of family pride, or what nobles preferred to call family spirit, gave a special cachet to noble death rituals. The most direct echo of this was to be found in their wills.

For more than a century French scholars have analyzed wills as a key to the legal systems of the past and as a window into mentalités, but there are no large-scale studies of noble wills in the nineteenth century. Noble wills governed the money flow between generations; in fact, they are the historical pendant to marriage contracts. Both, however, suffer frequently from imprecision. Just as the actual cash value of many dowries was not given, neither was the worth of many legacies. That is why enregistrement probate records, which imposed a tax on the values of estates, are more useful to the social historian investigating whether nobles became wealthier or poorer over time. On the other hand, wills provided an immediate witness to concerns quite other than those of the tax collector. Exhortations to children, the symbolism of some bequests, the religious views of the deceased, and evidence of family feuds and alliances, all may be found in wills. This was particularly true of the testament mystique, sealed and secret and consigned to the care of the notary until death, or the testament olographe, written entirely in the handwriting of the testator, then signed and dated. The other type of will, the testament public, was drawn up by the notary and witnessed. The latter was more impersonal in language and detail but even so provides much information on the economics of many noble families.
The most evident feature of noble nineteenth-century wills is their frequent anachronism. A variety of studies have confirmed that the use of Catholic religious terminology declined markedly in commoner wills made since the mid-eighteenth century in France. After the Revolution nobles reverted to earlier forms, although it can be noted that even during the Enlightenment they were more resistant than commoners to the rise of secularism. Noblemen were less likely than nobewomen to make provision for Masses or to give detailed instructions about their tombstone, and so forth, but there was still a general religiosity present.87

More than a third of the male wills and a half of the female wills contained explicit invocations, such as that of Mme Choiseul d’Esguilly in her testament (1810), repeated word-for-word by her daughter in 1837: “I commend my soul to God and beg him to show mercy upon the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, of Saint Joseph, and of my patron saints.”88 Vicomte de Bruges, a provençal living in Paris who died in November 1820, headed his will with “In the Name of the Holy Trinity: So Be It” and began with the following statement: “I leave my soul to God, praying him to receive it in the bosom of his mercy, wishing to be buried in the most modest way possible, and in a cemetery of the Roman and Apostolic Catholic Church; wishing that my children may be maintained in the exercise of my religion, and begging my dear wife to demand from them the carrying out of all that it lays down.”89

There was a general proliferation of rituals surrounding noble funerals. One ingenious study of almost four hundred death announcements primarily from noble families of southeastern France noted the steady increase in the number of lines of print enumerating the relatives of the deceased, which grew from an average of almost six prior to 1850, rose to over sixteen from 1860 to 1870, and reached more than forty-two by 1910–20.90 The conclusion drawn was that thanks to a national postal service, it was possible to make apparent long-distance stylized affirmations of the family possession of its dead, or at the least a reminder of the network of relatives. It was quite different from the handbills of the eighteenth century inviting the public to attend the funeral to aid the departed soul with their prayers. The growing stress on the private networks of families is a central argument to this study.

Ostentation in those rituals was at odds with the actual texts of wills, which frequently requested a simple funeral. Mme de Choiseul-Praslin, née O’Brien Thomond, in her 1808 will said, “I ask to be buried in the most simple way possible, and without these invitations that are scattered about in recent times and are neither received nor sent by sentiment.”91 Of course, there may have been a tacit understanding that executors would, on social grounds, disregard what the defunct wanted
on religious ones, just as medieval kings pardoned in their wills prisoners and enemies although well aware that their successors would not implement their pious intentions. The duc de Choiseul-Praslin seemed to make this point in his will of 25 August 1835:

I ask that this multitude of announcements [billets de part] not be sent out to strangers or the indifferent: the regrets of my friends, if I have the happiness to inspire such, are the only retinue that I wish to see accompany my mortal remains. I want my funeral to be without ceremoniousness or ostentation, and as I have always seen that despite such a recommendation in fact magnificent catafalques are always put up, and in order to prevent that, I want my funeral expenses not to exceed twelve hundred francs, not including those of transportation. 92

At the same time that the number of those named on the “multitude of announcements” was increasing (quintupling from the 1820s to the 1890s) there was also a steady increase in the number of those of whom the public was informed they died “furnished with the sacraments.” 93 There was now a conscious anachronism, reaching back to the piety before that collapse of religious references that has been discerned in the middle decades of the preceding century.

THE FUNERAL CEREMONIES

Requests in wills about the type of ceremony ranged from asking for a fifth-class funeral to limiting the sums of money to be spent, to specifying the number of paupers who were to follow the bier in the procession, and to other details of the occasion. Over two-thirds of bachelors and married women gave instructions about their funerals and graves, but only one in four married men did so. In general, spinsters were less likely than married women to be given an elaborate funeral. Spinsters were more likely than married women to die intestate, as the low frequency of their wills in notarial archives illustrates. Mlle Bolle de la Salle was an exception on both counts, noting in July 1838 that “I want to be placed in a walnut coffin screwed down. I want twenty of the most unfortunate paupers in the arrondissement where I shall die to follow my convoy, each to be given three francs and a candle, and four carriages in mourning to follow my convoy and bring back the twenty poor paupers.” She left money for the elevation of a single sarcophagus of antique form over her own grave, and that of her woman friend, at Pére la Chaise cemetery, and she asked a vicomtesse to ask her husband and father to follow her funeral possession. Since women did not participate in the procession (they only started to do so in the 1880s), male mourners were needed to give the occasion its due gravity. 94 Spinsters were less likely than married women to express fulsome “family” sentiments
in their extant wills, as though their lives had failed their purpose without child or husband.

Instructions about the location of one’s tomb were common. Mme de Choiseul-Praslin specified in 1808 that her body was to be buried with her husband’s (at Praslin) but her heart was to be interred “in the special little garden at Auteuil” with the body of her second son, who had died in that house. There was a distinction between the body which belonged to the family and the affections of a mother. In 1826 Mme de Bohm, née Girardin, decided that “I do not wish to be put in a lead coffin nor in a sepulchral vault nor in any massive, closed, stone structure; some shrubs that do not need annual cultivation shall be planted in the enclosure where I shall lie.” Mme. de Choiseul-Sérent wished to be buried at Picpus, with its memories of the victims of the Terror, and her will, made in 1840, rang with Catholic piety—was not her widowed son-in-law cardinal Rohan-Chabot?

In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, My God, I commend myself to your mercy, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, and my patron saints, I thank you for having made me a Christian, for having given me a father, a mother, a sister, a husband, a daughter, and a son-in-law that I have so justly cherished: you have given them to me, you have taken them away, may your indulgence reunite us in the heavenly home [demeure du ciel]. I wish to be taken to Picpus, where are deposited the remains of those who were dear to me. I want to be buried without ceremony, only at the door of the church, in the most simple drapery, no drapery in the interior of the church, nor coat-of-arms—what is called a fifth-class burial. . . . I want if twelve priests are able to take part in my burial that each receive twenty-five francs. If that is possible, I hope that one hundred Masses may be said for the repose of my soul in the month of death and that each one is paid three francs.

There seems to be evidence that elaborate tombs were erected more frequently towards the end of the nineteenth century than at the beginning, a trend not confined to French nobles, as can be confirmed from the burial grounds of Victorian English Canada. Vovelle is provocatively excessive when he speaks of these ornate tombs as a barricade against death, but certainly the cult of the dead took on a rotund vehemence in the nineteenth century. For nobles the distinction was made between those who could be interred in the noblest ground of all, that of their château chapel, and those who lay in a public place. Joseph de Villele was buried in the consecrated ground of the chapel beside the Mourvilles-Basses château which was built and dedicated in the decade before his death. The Choiseul-Praslins were buried in or around their
chapel at Vaux-Praslin, but after the sale of the estate in 1875 the remains were moved to the Maincy parish church. Comte de Maille, who died in 1839, wished to be buried in the Montmartre cemetery in a plot purchased for perpetuity: “It is to be surrounded with an iron grill. On my tomb shall be placed a simple marble stone on which shall be written in gold letters: the Cte de Maillé Latour Landry, g.h.d'h. de Monsieur [gentilhomme d'honneur de Monsieur—later Charles x] born the 24 June 1771 died the. . . .”

Mme de Briey (1857) also specified the inscription she wanted on her tomb, one emphasizing that she was doubly a comtesse: “Maximilienne, Ctesse de Coudenhove, née Ctesse de Briey l’an 1780—décédée à l’âge de ______ passant, priez pour elle.”

The text of these inscriptions was evidently intended to remind members of the family of elements of the personal biography that they should keep constantly in mind.

MASSES FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOUL

The importance of memorial Masses as an indicator of religiosity has not passed unnoticed by historians. In the nineteenth century nobles had both the wealth and the inclination to make such provision more often than any other sector of the French population. Mme Choiseul d’Esguilly, a wealthy widow, specified in 1810 what arrangements were to be made on her behalf:

During the week of my death fifty Low Masses will be said in the Church of St. Thomas d’Aquin, my parish, for which three francs will be paid for each. Forty days after my death twenty-four Low Masses shall be said in the said church, of which the honoraria shall be paid at six francs each: four candles will be lit on each of the altars where these masses shall be said. This shall be done on free days, so they will be said in black [priestly robes]. These honoraria for the Masses shall be given to the curé of the said parish, and he shall be charged to do them [four donations to the poor]. I want every Sunday during the year of my death to have a de profundis sung at the end of the High Mass for the repose of my soul, in the parishes of St. Parize and of Montigny (Nièvre), and the curés of the said parishes are to be paid an honorarium of 150F for the year, quarterly. It shall also be paid to the churchwardens of each of the said parishes six francs every three months during the said year.

Mme Geneviève-Françoise de Machault d’Arnouville showed a typical concern for intercessionary Masses after her death (which took place in September 1869). She bequeathed six hundred francs of perpetual annuity to the local curé at Arnouville to say Mass each Sunday, and upon days of obligation when invited to do so, at the château chapel for the repose of her soul, that of the parish’s benefactors, and for her
husband and son. Among the wills examined there is a slight pro-
gression towards more numerous Masses, particularly in those years of
the religious revival associated with Lourdes and the polarization of
Catholic opinion in the 1860s, but the small numbers incite caution.

BEQUESTS TO THE POOR
Charitable bequests to the poor were more likely from married women,
especially widows, and bachelors than from married men or spinsters.
In general these bequests were to the paupers of specified places, self-
evitably underlining the idea of “feudal” charity, or at least to the
parish of which the deceased was a distinguished member. Such dona-
tions were often intertwined with provisions for the saying of Masses, as
in the will of Mme Choiseul d’Esguilly above. The widowed duchesse de
Choiseul-Praslin established six small incomes ranging from 1,500F to
3,000F which she insisted were to provide not a cash distribution to the
indigent but bread, wood, and other necessities for the poor born in the
communes or living there for at least ten years. She added that she had
already set up rentes in several communes where her husband had held
properties and where she wanted his name to be always blessed and that
she hoped to augment these rentes during her own lifetime, since “I
believe that it is more meritorious to impose upon oneself some priva-
tions and to give during one’s life what one can, rather than to charge
one’s beneficiaries with it.”

SERVANTS
Nobles were fairly sensitive to rewarding servants of long standing.
Bachelors were more responsive to the surrogate family relationship
with long-term servants who cared for them in age, while married men
and women were only half as likely to make provisions for employees in
their wills. There was a limit to the loyalties enunciated in the theory.
The researcher soon encounters a less fulsome devotion on the part of
some legatees who had to carry out the injunctions. One Leveneur
wrote to another member of that wealthy family of the Orne in De-
cember 1827 to exhort him to respect their father’s wishes about gener-
osity to the servants, who were to be paid a year’s wages. These could be
calculated as pay during the current year, which had begun the pre-
vious July, and so “it is only seven months of which we make them a
present.” He added that since their father left no debts and could have
burdened them with still heavier obligations, they should respect his
wishes. Clearly there had been a discussion about reneging on that
obligation. Similar fears may explain the precision with which Mme
de Girardin in 1864 made payments of her bequest to servants a condi-
tion of her legacy of mortgages to a young niece. If the mortgages were
sold, sufficient funds to carry on payments to the servants were to be invested by the notary in the Lyon railway. Similar bequests would be most onerous in the aristocratic houses in Paris. A large and wealthy household had a hierarchy of servants. Baron de Canouville (whose will is reproduced in appendix 3) made a handsome bequest to his maître d’hôtel. In larger Paris houses there were other male servants, such as valets, gardeners, and porters, as well as housemaids and so forth. In a provincial city such as Nancy, where local nobles were less wealthy, they rarely had more than two servants, and these were almost always women, serving and cleaning in the rented apartments close to the cours Léopold, where the nobles passed the winter months, and then traveling with them to country properties during the summer months.

Comte Maillé Latour Landry’s 1839 will asked friends to visit and care for his grave, left a legacy to the Bons Secours sisters, and bequeathed his valet a rente viagère of 800F. Vicomte de Bruges provided an annual pension of 300F for “Louis my negro for his faithful services” and admonished his wife and children to continue to look after him “even if he was no longer of any use for anything.” Davessens de Moncal, a Toulouse landowner, left a cook an annual pension of 924F, presumably for his culinary efforts. Pons de Fumel in 1832, quoted below, was concerned for his employees and asked his son to look after his former nursemaid, who had been with the family for twenty-nine years, by giving her an annual revenue of 300F and the furnishing of a room. He went on to enumerate among other donations to the faithful servant three teaspoons and a silver goblet. A noble bachelor living in Sens, M. de Fleurigny, in his will made between 1839 and 1843 was tightfisted in his legacies, giving a single rente perpetuelle to his maidservant (250F per annum) and leaving to his other servants in one case an overcoat and in another clothes at the executor’s discretion. His will thus reveals the absolute minimum that the stingiest noble not dead to posthumous shame could leave to servants: subsistence to those closest to him (“to old Gérard the job he is doing”) and some personal effects.

FAMILY SPIRIT
While explicit Catholic invocations and requests for Masses were part of the will, so were repeated injunctions to family members not to squabble over the bequests. In some ways this was an “invocation” of the lares et penates, the collectivity of the family and unity. The former officer Pons de Fumel married the daughter of a former conseiller in the Parlement of Bordeaux, Dusault, and observed in his will of 3 May 1832 that “being of an advanced age, and having to undertake a voyage at the time when a murderous illness ravages France [cholera], it is the duty of a
good Christian and the father of a family to make a will, for what little he has, in order to be sure in his last moments of the future tranquility in his family.”

Other wills showed the desire to avoid dispute as well as to uphold formal religiosity in family documents where bourgeois rarely used it. E. G. J. de Pérusse Descars Ctesse de Bréon douairière, as she signed her 1852 will, was concerned that her son would take care of his sister in recompense for her care and affection, remembering that because she was unmarried she had never had a trousseau—that is to say, she had never been a drag on the family purse and had not required a dowry—and a little later she asked her son not to take what might be owing to him on the share of his sister, “my daughter, who has always shared the constraints and privations that I have had to impose on myself since the bad state of our affairs.”

**MEMENTOS AND FAMILY LEGACIES**

Bequests often revealed a desire to celebrate the family history. Joseph de Villèle had highly systematic social and political beliefs. He began his will with an invocation of divine misericordia and left to his wife during her lifetime and then to his son Henri family portraits, papers, titles, decorations, engravings, medallions, and other items that had come into his possession through his parents, from Louis xvm and Charles x, and from foreign rulers. The order of provenance is carefully given:

Not certainly that I want to make of them an object of vanity in my family, but the same motivation that makes me transmit after me the documents that I have been able to gather on our origin, the same motivation that causes me to wish to be buried at Mourvilles, brings me to desire the conservation among the heirs of my name of everything that can inspire in them family spirit and attachment to the place where [the family] has been established for a long time as an element of happiness, of wisdom, and of good conduct for those who shall come after me.

His son was enjoined again to look after his sisters throughout his life, “especially if they should have the misfortune to lose us before being married or if they should survive their husbands.” The will ended with another religious invocation. The Villèle will reiterated family ideology just as much as it made arrangements to bequeath property. For her part the duchesse de Maillé (whose marriage contract is reproduced in appendix 2) went into elaborate detail in her 1850 will on the subject of her manuscripts, which she requested Salvandy to edit and publish in a select edition of ten copies. She assured posterity that her motive was not literary vanity, but “it is sweet for me to be sure that I shall never cease to exist through my thought for my family and my friends.”
FAMILY SPIRIT IN PRACTICE

Points raised here about family life can be seen with more clarity if we examine a particular noblesse family. The berrichon Aiguirande family had been titled for sixteen generations at the start of the nineteenth century, descending from medieval, chevalresque origins. The oldest brother, Armand, a dragoon captain before the Revolution, in 1799 at age thirty-nine married a first cousin, from whom he had no issue. He was wealthy, with a sizable estate. The second oldest brother was thirty-seven in 1800, having joined the Cistercians in 1785 before leaving them in 1792 as a result of the dissolution. Then he returned to the family château at Levroux (Indre), where he lived until his death on 29 August 1843. Charles, the youngest of the three, was thirty-five in 1800.

Unlike his eldest brother, who had an estate, and the other, who enjoyed the security of ecclesiastical life, before the Revolution Charles was required to show the initiative of cadets. When the Revolution began, he showed no hostility; instead he continued to serve in the army until 1793. He returned briefly to the Republican armies in 1795 and then went on to take up a position in the Parisian legion of the general police. In one sense such divergencies might prove politically useful to a family. The Aiguirandes, for example, could invoke both Revolutionary and royalist sympathies as required, although as will become apparent, there was no love lost between the eldest and the youngest brothers on that score. Early in the century Charles returned to the Cher, but without a noble bride. Instead he lived with the daughter of a local day laborer born at Levroux. Doubtless the house he bought in the year XIII was to facilitate this liaison. Two daughters were born to the couple before their civil marriage when the mother was thirty-eight. Only in 1826, within a year of Charles's death, did the religious marriage take place. Even in a province like the Berry, notorious for its tepid piety, such blatant disregard for moral conventions by a member of a distinguished family was scandalous. Charles's heir, Alexandre-Charles-François, was the third child.

The elderly abbé Aiguirande, who had lived with Charles for some time despite this unedifying situation, sent a note from Levroux to the oldest brother inviting him to attend the funeral. The abbé noted that only Armand, the head of the family and the oldest, was suitable to take legal responsibility for three minor children. He could not assume such a charge himself because of gout. The annotation made on the back of the death notice, obviously returned to the abbé, is a dry statement that Article 433 of the Civil Code permits a person over sixty-five years of age to refuse that responsibility and points out that he, Armand, is sixty-seven:
I refuse to be the guardian of the children of late monsieur, your brother. I believe, however, that I have to observe that the man who wanted to make an attempt on my life, who was constantly my cruelest enemy, was never able to wish that I replace him in his family and that this would be to go against his intentions. . . . Nobody better than you can more agreeably for the family take on the title of tuteur and curateur [legal designations of responsibility]. I am distant from all this and could only displease, and perhaps I would upset the common peace. I cannot forget that this marriage was made with the intention of driving me to despair. That aim has been completely successful, and it would be impossible for me to overcome the wounds that have been inflicted on me. They still bleed and would poison whatever vestiges of sentiment remain to me. Farewell my brother. Look after yourself well.

The bitter antipathies between the brothers shown by this letter need no emphasis. Despite this outburst, Armand in fact accepted his blood responsibilities and accepted the guardianship of his brother’s children. Armand, head of the family, was a careful manager. He sold his Villedieu estate on 20 July 1792 and by acts of 10–11 May 1793 he acquired the Romsac château which had been confiscated by the nation. He paid 369,300F and also paid off various rentes. This display of patriotic investment did not save him from several months’ imprisonment in Chateauroux in the autumn of 1793, but upon his release he returned to activities in local administration that he had first begun in 1789. The mayor of Saint Phalier commune near Levroux in the year IX, he was among the richest landowners of the department under the Restoration, paying 7,555F 76 in cens. (At his death in 1831 he left five rentes viagères of 600F to servants which were to revert to the estate in due course.) In time this wealth devolved on the son of Charles d’Aiguirande, born on 13 May 1815, who, together with his sisters, had gone to live at Romsac with Uncle Armand upon their father’s death. In 1832 the younger sister married M. de Piègu. On 10 April 1839 Alexandre-Charles married the widow de Preaulx, daughter of one of Marie-Antoinette’s pages. Their child was born prematurely and died. Alexandre-Charles himself died at Romsac in May 1841. After an interval of ten years, his widow married a former French cavalry officer, according to the Anglican rite and in London, but he was killed just three years later in a hunting accident. Alexandre-Charles’s widow returned to Romsac, where she lived until her own death in 1878. A cadet branch of the family survived until 1866 in the Pas-de-Calais, but only daughters were born, and the family name died out. Nobody could control the sex of the unborn nor calculate in advance an adult’s marriage chances; even less could one know the hour of his own end. However, if the
Aiguirandes display anything, it is behavior sharply at variance with what was preached by the *bien pensant* press. Irreligion, purchase of *biens nationaux*, *mésalliance*, bastards, and family squabbling were all found in this wealthy old knightly family.

Precisely the same tensions could be found in many thousands of other noble households, but as in the case of the Aiguirandes, these are best studied in public archives, where there is more likelihood of encountering unedulcorated historical records. The permutations in every family’s conduct could bewilder. The number of daughters to dower, the inheritance in near or distant view, the profitability of estates and their location, the political favors enjoyed—all modified the family hopes and fears. The noble lineage’s fate depended on far more than simply the prescriptions of the Civil Code.

There is little doubt that the post-Revolutionary *noblesse* became more parsimonious. Ascetic self-control had always been respected as an aristocratic virtue, almost as much as its equally rare opposite, truly majestic extravagance. Democratic pleasures are those accessible to all: wide-throated, full-bellied enjoyments dreamed of by those who had known penury. If the rich commoner was “fat” in the indicators of social life, the noble was “thin” without being obliged to be. The *nouveau riche* was derided by nobles as a glutton in an overdecorated home. Comtesse de Bradi wrote a chapter in her 1842 etiquette book on the need to avoid any appearance of gourmandism when invited to dinner. She exhorted her readers not to indulge in effusive praises of rich dishes. Modesty and economy, genteel penny-pinching, now became a distinctive cachet. Thriftiness that increased the family patrimony was excellent. One Toulouse noble’s 1846 eulogy proclaimed, “In the buildings that he put up one would look in vain for any appearance of a luxury which he never liked. He limited himself to the point that each of them displayed all the decorum desirable.”

Tocqueville’s aside that “the respect paid to wealth in England is enough to make one despair” is a commentary on the same theme. So too is the description given by Mme d’Armaille in her evocative recollection of aristocratic family life in the 1850s:

Family assemblies under the same roof remained as a kind of privilege, and it is a fact that patriarchal traditions and the most respectable virtues remained there and were perpetuated. I shall add that intelligence, conversation, politeness gained from this, instead of losing as some like to think. The vast mansions of the faubourg Saint-Germain lent themselves, moreover, to these kinds of family phalansteries. Far from being embarrassed by the lack of fortune, by the need to live economically, to dress modestly, to be content with old servants with country manners, of using antique carriages and of
observing the abstinences and religious and charitable practices of
the past, the heads of family and the mistresses of the houses
showed in all this a very justified pride and thus succeeded in again
displaying some dignity. It was in that manner that it was known
how to live in the houses of Gontaut, de la Rochefoucauld, de
Périgord, etc., the families of Montesquiou, de Biencourt,
d’Orglandes, de Vogué, Champagne, many others, and finally our-
selves, although the habits of my parents were less severe and less
austere than those of the houses of the faubourg Saint-Germain and
of those who remained purely Legitimists.\textsuperscript{120}

If simplicity and thriftiness were virtues respected by all nobles, the
century saw a widening gap between those who successfully increased
their wealth (and whose names later appeared in \textit{Le Figaro} as the gratin
so assiduously studied by Marcel Proust) and the provincial \textit{noblesse}
fearful of Parisian life, which revealed their wallets’ limitations. Few
daughters of the middling Gascon or Breton gentry could aspire to take
part in the spectacle in the Bois breathlessly recorded by Peat North in
1866:

Princess de Bauffremont on a dark bay mare, the Duchess of
Fitzjames and her two sons, Baroness Lejeune, Countess de
Baulincourt, Baroness de Pierre and Baroness Saint Dider may be
seen almost every morning enjoying a canter in the shady alleys of
the Bois, riding better than any women in France, capitally mounted,
and dressed as ladies ought to dress on horseback. \textit{Du reste}, each
and all I have mentioned ride to hounds, and manage their hunters
as well and as gracefully as they do their park hacks, as anyone who
hunted last season the Touraine and Anjou country can testify.\textsuperscript{121}

The continuing trajectory of these great aristocratic fortunes towards
the end of the nineteenth century was recalled by Elisabeth Clermont-
Tonnerre, born a Gramont, who described with her incomparable
sprightliness a style of life enjoyed from the Second Empire to the \textit{Belle
Epoque} in terms that illustrate a number of our themes:

Saint-Assise was a nice Louis xvi château on a terrace rising out of
the Seine, surrounded by woods full of game. I often used to go
there on a visit to my grandfather Beauvau. He lived there in
patriarchal fashion with his second wife, Adèle de Gontaut (who had
twenty-one brothers and sisters: Joseph, afterwards member for the
Basses-Pyrénées. Paul, Bernard, Edmond, Gaston and Xavier, who
went through Saint-Cyr, Geneviève, the canoness, Madame de
Gaigneron, Madame de Liedekerke, the Comtesse Armand, Madame
d’Hurst, etc. . . .); his daughters, Jeanne de Mun and Loulou de
Blacas; his sons-in-law; and his sister Béatrix, who had married
Comte Horace de Choiseul. The Choiseuls occupied a villa by the
waterside at Seine-Port and spent their days at Sainte-Assise. I must say that extreme bonhomie and a pleasant spirit of indulgence prevailed. A state of placidity such as that has disappeared from our social life. There were no "parties," as they are called, at Sainte-Assise, but always between twenty and thirty people staying there and living together after a fashion impossible nowadays. . . .

Though a rich man he (Beauvau) indulged the usual French niggardliness. At his table he served piquette, the thin wine sent him in casks from his vineyards of La Sarthe. He possessed sumptuous tapestries and furniture, but never had anything repaired. The second floor rooms were paved, and I used to build castles with the loose tiles. No need to remark that there was no water laid on in the house. Every morning a footman used to carry up two buckets of cold water and a kettle of hot water which smelt of smoke.

Yet my grandfather passed, and rightly passed, for one of the largest landed proprietors of his time. He had biens, to use that obsolete expression, in the départements of Seine-et-Marne and La Sarthe, in Nivernais, that Royal Dutch of landed estates, and lastly goodness knows how many farms in Multien. He used to make tours through his domains and good farmer and wise administrator as he was knew how to manage them. A lot in the avenue Montaigne awaited but his pleasure to be transformed into a mansion, but he preferred to look at it as it was from the windows of an inexpensive flat he inhabited just opposite. In his youth he had owned race-horses; then he was appointed conseiller général for La Sarthe and held that post for some time.

Saint-Assise was his favourite home. In autumn he used to organize great battues of partridge and rabbits, much sought after, but he did not preserve pheasants. Thanks to his thrift he was able to increase his fortune, and to this day a dozen families, my own among them, live on the Beauvau money. 122

The description shows well the place of family and château among the wealthiest aristocrats. By the 1870s the minor gentry had grasped what Choiseul saw in 1800. Political and ideological loyalties were henceforth secondary to the ongoing interests of the noble family. A whole code of conduct that protected the family predominated among French nobles; at the same time, they realized that they could never again aspire to rule the nation.

During the century since Louis xvi's accession the noble family became more and more inward-looking, particularly among the aristocracy, which despite their bishops, ambassadors, and general councillors, had less of a handle on the highest state positions than before the Revolution. One constant, however, was that girls were given little or no
say in the choice of their partners. Certainly the very young marriages of aristocrats of both sexes before the Revolution did not take place afterwards, but most girls were married before they were twenty. Their husbands were more likely to be older, and by a wider margin than in the total French population. The women who had played such an important part in protecting the interests of noble families during the Revolution were followed by generations whose stress was again on paternalism. This also meant, paradoxically, that the old women were most likely to survive from each generation, and thanks to the provisions of the régime dotal, they often possessed great means. French noblewomen did not, however, use their advantages in education, wealth, and privilege to question the primacy of the family realm in their lives.

What set nobles apart from commoners under democracy was their different use and understanding of kinship bonds. Their family links were not so much different in kind as they were an extra extension of the feelings of family solidarity normal in France at that time. These emphasized economic support and production and, it need hardly be said, were quite different from twentieth-century European ideas of love and affection.123 Noble kinship had the same base but also included the custody of ancestral prestige, either real or fictive, which had to be passed on. It may be objected that concern for family reputation and renown was not restricted to nobles, as can be inferred from the pride of political and business dynasties both past and present; however, one could not continue to be noble outside of the kinship network. The bourgeois politician and businessman were not so limited. Both gloried in essentially individual accomplishments in the nineteenth century, and if the commoner placed himself at the behest of his relations, he was not obliged to do so. On the other hand, the noble under the conditions of Frenchmen equal before the law who jettisoned the family gradually ceased to exist as a noble. The bourgeois pursued the road that led to the affective marital link at the heart of the modern family. Nobles accepted and indeed rejoiced in those obligations of kinship that meant a real limit on individualism.