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SERVANTS
It is necessary to overcome the repugnance and to dissipate the boredom which the reading of these writings [about the household and its organization] inspires. One must descend to details so ignoble that my pen would have fallen from my hand, had I not felt that the result would justify the undertaking.

—Abbé Grégoire, *De la Domesticité chez les peuples anciens et modernes*

What was it like to be a domestic servant in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France? What attracted so many people to the occupation? We ourselves would, I think, find servanthood so distasteful that we find it hard to believe that anyone given another choice, would willingly have become a domestic. But the *menu peuple* of Old Regime France saw the occupation in a very different light. To them it was, in terms of its work, living conditions, and financial rewards one of the more desirable employment opportunities.

**Servants’ Work**

During the Old Regime, servants’ work had three basic characteristics. It was, first of all, in comparison with other occupations, extremely unspecialized. Tanners cured leather and cobblers made shoes, but servants were expected to be what one sixteenth-century poet called them: “varlets à tout faire” and “chambrières à tout faire,” jacks and jills of all trades, ready to turn their hands to a wide variety of tasks if the need arose.

Secondly, the rhythm of servants’ work was extremely erratic. Usually short bursts of frantic activity punctuated long stretches of comparative idleness. Of course, uneven work rhythms were characteristic of all labor in the preindustrial period, before the Industrial Revolution made workers adapt to
the discipline of machines. In the eighteenth century, even in so specialized and mechanized a trade as printing, the workday was an erratic mixture of “work” and “play.” But the rhythms of servants’ work were even more discontinuous than those of other preindustrial occupations, and servants, especially lackeys, enjoyed long periods of idleness envied by the rest of the menu peuple.

The third characteristic of servants’ work was that little of it was what we would call housework. As we have seen, among the reasons for employing servants in the Old Regime the creation of a comfortable domestic environment was, at least until the last decades before the Revolution, low on the list. Therefore much of the servants' time was taken up with tasks very different from the cooking and cleaning which the nineteenth-century has taught us to think of as servants’ work.

The unspecialized nature of servants’ work is especially obvious in the small households of the bourgeoisie and artisanate. Their single servant—or more often servante—had to do literally everything necessary to keep the household functioning. The immense variety of tasks that made up her working day is described in a seventeenth-century household manual, Audiger's *La Maison réglée*, published in 1695. According to Audiger, every morning the servante must rise at dawn, make a fire in the kitchen and set her pot-au-feu to simmering. She then should do the marketing, keeping careful accounts of money spent and not wasting time in idle gossip. When she returns home she must make the beds and clean the bedchambers. If the household includes children, she must wake them, feed them, dress them, and see that they get off to school. The rest of her day is spent in cleaning, and in preparing and serving the déjeuner (the main meal of the day, served at noon) and the souper (the evening meal). But she must always be prepared to drop whatever she is doing and run errands for her master and mistress. We might add, although Audiger does not, that in the households of artisans and shopkeepers servantes were expected to perform industrial labor as well as household chores. The maid of a boulanger might serve customers behind the counter; a couturière's servant would sew when she was not doing housework; and a tisserand’s would spend most of her time weaving alongside the master's wife and daughters.

Male domestics in one- or two-servant households also performed a variety of tasks, although simply because they were male servants their duties were more likely to involve public display to enhance the dignity of their employers. *Domestiques* too marketed, cooked, and cleaned; they shaved their masters and cared for their clothes; they helped out in the stables or shop. But when they stepped across the threshold they were often required to don livery and behave as though they were a great lord’s lackeys, for this would reflect prestige upon their employers.

In the large households of the nobility a much greater specialization of labor among servants was possible. These establishments displayed, although
only in a rudimentary form, the elaborate servant hierarchy and strict division of labor that would characterize great households in the nineteenth century. At the summit of this incipient servant hierarchy were the respectable gentlemen servants: the chaplain, the intendant or *homme de confiance*, the secretary, the tutor. Their prestige derived both from the dignity of their tasks and from their direct descent from the gentlemen servants of the Middle Ages. They did not have to wear livery, and often did not even have to reside in the households of their masters. Thirteen percent of such servants listed on the *capitation* roll in Toulouse in 1695 were heads of their own households. When they did “live in,” they were set off from the lesser servants by special marks of status: a newspaper advertisement for a tutor specified that he “would be lodged, shod, lit, fed, and supplied with linen like the master of the house.”

The prestige of these positions allowed bourgeois to occupy them with no loss of status. Even in the late eighteenth century, when the bourgeoisie increasingly shunned the occupation of servant, they continued to fill such posts. For example, in 1788, Sr. Jérôme Réal, son of a Toulousan négociant, was secretary to a seigneur. This sort of servant made respectable marriages—Sr. Réal wed the daughter of a sieur who had a dowry of 4,000 livres—and lived in respectable bourgeois style. Forty-two percent of the secretaries and *hommes de confiance* listed on Toulouse’s *capitation* rolls in 1695, 1750, and 1789 employed servants of their own.

The tasks of such servants were fairly straightforward: tutors taught, chaplains cared for the spiritual welfare of the household. But in addition to these functions gentlemenly domestics also often had a rather amorphous set of duties perhaps best labeled as financial management. That is, they did for their employers what hordes of accountants, stockbrokers, investment counselors, and tax lawyers do for the wealthy today: they managed their money with an eye to the greatest profit for their employers—and for themselves. Many great lords apparently simply handed over all their money to their secretaries or (aptly named) *hommes de confiance*, who were expected to dole it out when needed. The apocryphal but nonetheless true-to-life memoirs of the “Comte de Bonneval” (supposedly a French general who changed allegiances, fought in the Austrian army, and ended his career as an adviser to the sultan of Turkey) include a character named Dominique, described by the “Comte” as “my *homme de confiance*, who governs my purse and warns me when it is empty.”

A real life equivalent of Dominique was Goujon, *maître d’hôtel* to Monseigneur de Belsunce, archbishop of Marseilles during the plague of the 1720s. Goujon recorded in his *livre de raison* in December 1722: “I have given to the Monseigneur 120 louis d’or, which makes 5,400 livres, for his trip to Paris.” Obviously Goujon controlled the purse strings in that household.

Even when servants were not given complete charge of their masters’ finances, they often had extensive responsibility for purchasing items needed in the household. Indeed such purchasing (usually done with their own money, for
which they were later reimbursed by their employers) was one of the major duties of all types of servants, not just secretaries. The maître d’hôtel bought the household’s food, as the following description of his duites in Audiger’s La Maison réglée shows:

The duty of the maître d’hôtel consists of the general spending done daily in a great household. . . . It is he who bargains with a good baker, for bread for the master’s table. . . . He must know meat and bargain with the butcher. . . . He must . . . sometimes go to the country to learn the current prices of everything in season. . . . He must bargain with an épicière for sugar and with a candlemaker for candles.8

Even in modest bourgeois households the servante did the marketing for her mistress. Other types of servants also made purchases for their employers. The household accounts of a late eighteenth-century Maréchal de Mirepoix contain a demand for reimbursement of expenses submitted by the femme de chambre, Mlle. Bellisent, listing three livres, eighteen sous, in tips to various messengers and delivery boys, one livre, four sous, for paper and ink, and twelve sous for toys for Mme. La Maréchale’s cat.9 Similarly, the household accounts of the Duc and Duchesse de Fitz-James include requests for reimbursement from the groom (for eleven livres of unspecified stable supplies), the valet de chambre des enfants (he apparently bought all the children’s clothes, and his accounts include 181 livres 10 sous spent on twenty-nine pairs of shoes for young Mlle. de Fitz-James in the period from November 1782 to July 1784), and the tutor (he sought reimbursement for pens, an inkwell, a volume of Caesar’s Commentaries, and four tickets in the public coach to Versailles, in which he took the duke’s sons to watch the opening of the Estates-General in 1789).10

The privilege of purchasing was important to servants, for it constituted a lucrative supplement to their salaries, as did their other accepted perquisites—the gifts of food at Easter and New Year’s, the “baker’s dozen” (the maître d’hôtel received one free loaf of bread from the baker for every twelve he ordered), and the cook’s right to sell all the grease rendered in cooking.11 Obviously a servant’s opportunities to feather his own nest, or ferrer la mule, as it was called in the ancien régime, were extensive. The technique is described in a bit of seventeenth-century poetry, La Maitôte des cuisinières, ou la manière de bien ferrer la mule.12 This is a supposed dialogue between an elderly cook and her neophyte colleague, whom she instructs in the fine art of defrauding her masters. Always buy the fattest meat, so that there will be lots of grease to sell, she suggests. Always pad your marketing accounts; collect kickbacks from merchants; and don’t forget to “lose” your marketing money every few months. If you play your cards right, my girl, she says, you can end up like me, with fine furniture in your room and 1,000 écus worth of rentes on the Cinq Grosses Fermes. This fictional picture of servant profiteering was
only slightly exaggerated. In the early nineteenth century the Abbé Grégoire estimated that at least 4 percent of all money spent on food ended up in the pockets of the domestics, and one eighteenth-century chef, M. L'Amireau, wrote to his fiancée that they could marry earlier than they had originally planned because his "petits profits de cuisine [were] coming along so well." 13

We may wonder why employers tolerated such costly practices. Didn't they realize they were being cheated? Of course they did. The young Comte Dufort de Cheverny once bribed his tutor to turn a blind eye to his misbehavior with an offer to let him handle his financial affairs: "You will keep my books, you will pay my bills, and that will set you up for life." 14 Employers regarded this as the price they had to pay to preserve their dignity. It would not do for aristocrats, who should disdain mere money-grubbing, to haggle with common tradesmen. Thus the system had advantages for both master and servant: masters kept their dignity, and servants derived not only profits but prestige from the patronage they could dispense through the trust of their masters.

The enjoyment of their master's confidence and trust also gave prestige to the next highest group in the servant hierarchy of large noble households: the femmes and valets de chambre, the personal attendants of the master and mistress. They had few other claims to respect. Their tasks, described in one revolutionary pamphlet as "dressing, waking up, putting to bed, leading around, and indulging" a grown person as though he or she "were a child of three," were generally regarded as "lowly, wearisome, and humiliating." 15 They required little specialized skill or knowledge. Body servants' most difficult duties were caring for their employers' clothes, which involved knowing how to "iron, work in linen, whiten silk stockings, dye ribbons, and clean satins and taffetas" (as one femme de chambre advertised her accomplishments in Bordeaux's newspaper, the Journal de Guienne), 16 and dressing their hair. Even the daily powdering and curling of a gentleman's wig was difficult and time-consuming, while the creation of a woman's coiffure, which in the 1770s might tower several feet above her head and be crowned with pictures of public figures and events, and favorite horses, dogs, and loved ones, was a task of awesome complexity. 17 Admittedly most court ladies were coiffed by hairdressers who came to the house every day; teen-aged Laurette de Malboissière, the daughter of a tax-farmer, faithfully recorded the daily arrival of her coiffeur Garçon in her letters. 18 But femmes de chambre had to know how to touch up their creations, dismantle them, and deal with them in emergencies. One enterprising hairdresser in Bordeaux advertised lessons for ladies' maids in this difficult art. 19

Such skills brought little respect in the eyes of the world. What gave the femmes and valets de chambre their power and prestige, both within the household and without, was the fact that they lived on terms of intimacy and confidence with their masters and mistresses. Let us take the life of that young lady of fashion Laurette de Malboissière. Her femme de chambre, one Mlle.
Jaillié, was with her constantly, reading to her, walking with her, gossiping with her, caring for her toilette and her pet goldfinch. Mlle. Jaillié appeared in almost every one of Laurette’s letters; she was certainly mentioned more frequently than the girl’s parents or friends. Femmes and valets de chambre knew virtually everything there was to know about their employers. They often handled their finances and correspondence, especially in households where no secretary or homme de confiance was employed. Voltaire, Mme. de Genlis, and Napoleon’s mother, Madame Mère, were among those who used their body servants as secretaries. They helped their employers to receive guests, joining in the conversation and games, and they were privy to their love affairs. Obviously no fellow servant—and indeed no friend, lover, or favor-seeker—could afford to offend these powerful domestics, who could with a word turn Madame or Monsieur against them. Femmes and valets de chambre of the rich and powerful were assiduously cultivated with presents and flattery by their employers’ potential lovers and petitioners. The English tourist Fanny Cradock recorded a visit of an admirer, a German baron, thusly: “Baron Callenberg came in the morning; he offered me a very pretty little box of perfumed bonbons and to my femme de chambre a ribbon.” And Mme. de Pompadour’s femme de chambre, Mme. du Hausset, became rich from the gifts of those eager for the favor of her influential employer. The intimacy with their employers which gave such servants their prestige and power is well suggested in paintings like Boucher’s La Toilette (see figure 1). Note here the elegant appearance of this lady’s maid: only her unpowdered hair differentiates her from her mistress. Femmes and valets de chambre often imitated the dress and manners of their employers. Their fine clothes, savoir-faire, and knowledge of the haut monde further contributed to their prestige within the household.

The prestige of the kitchen staff, or gens de bouche, had a very different foundation. It rested on their acknowledged skill and talent, factors on which they based their unsuccessful attempt to escape from the stigma of servitude in the late eighteenth century. And indeed extraordinary skill and talent were required to produce the quantities and types of food consumed in the noble hôtels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the Old Regime as in the Middle Ages food was still a major status symbol, something to be displayed as much as consumed by those who could afford it. Staggering amounts of food emerged from the kitchens of noble hôtels every day. In eighteenth-century France there were two main meals, the diner, served in fashionable circles at two or three in the afternoon, and the souper, which began anywhere from nine to eleven and continued well into the night. The souper was in theory the more formal meal: women were formally dressed and coiffed for it, while for the diner they were formally coiffed but wore “morning dress.” Similar food was served at each meal. In 1746 the cookbook writer Menon suggested for a dinner for twelve a first course consisting of two soups,
A lady of fashion and her equally elegant femme-de-chambre.

a roast beef, and two hors d'oeuvres; a second course of more beef, veal with truffles, lamb chops, duck and chicken; a third service of two more roasts, three pâtés and two salads; and a dessert course of apples, pears, walnuts, crêpes, and jellies. This was for a simple bourgeois household. In noble establishments eight course meals were usual, with each course involving several more dishes, or plats, than those listed by Menon. Special feasts and entertainments were even more lavish. When Archbishop Lomenie de Brienne entertained the Parlement of Toulouse at dinner, it took his large kitchen staff six days to wash all the dirty china and cutlery.

All this food was served, or rather presented, in a manner that enhanced its visual impact of opulent extravagance. Until the 1860s, when the passing of dishes from diner to diner (called service à la russe) became the norm, food was served à la française. All the dishes of each course were put on the table, with the largest and most impressive roast in the center, the others arranged
symmetrically around it according to size, and the many small hors d’oeuvres comprising the outer ring. The diners sat around the edges of the table, and began by helping themselves to the nearest food, gradually working their way toward the prize in the center.\textsuperscript{30} Even the food itself was chosen to make a visual impression. Although French cuisine had by the eighteenth century taken its classic form, with relatively simple dishes that preserved the natural look and flavor of their ingredients, the medieval penchant for exotic and expensive ingredients and food that looked better than it tasted still lingered.\textsuperscript{31} Desserts, for example, were usually ices and jellies. They were prized for their costliness and their carefully molded shapes and jewel-like colors (blue and violet, created with costly indigo dyes) rather than for their taste, which was usually nonexistent.\textsuperscript{32}

Producing this sumptuous visual parade of food was the responsibility of the \textit{gens de bouche} who labored in the kitchens of the nobility. The plural is used deliberately, for most noble \textit{hôtels} had at least two kitchens, the kitchen proper, where the \textit{maître d’hôtel} and the \textit{cuisinier}, assisted by numerous \textit{aides} and \textit{garçons de cuisine}, reigned supreme, and the \textit{office}, domain of the \textit{officier} who had charge of the household’s bread, wine, silver, and linen and created its preserves, candies, liqueurs, and desserts. The \textit{office} was necessary because the preparation of desserts and preserves involved sugar, which absorbs moisture readily from the air and is then useless in many recipes. Such preparations therefore had to be done away from the moist and steamy air of the main kitchen.\textsuperscript{33} The main feature of the \textit{office} was an \textit{êtuve}, a storage space for sugar, candy, and the like, heated with a charcoal brazier to insure a constant flow of warm dry air. Because of its pleasant atmosphere, the \textit{office} was the place where the households’ servants ate their meals and spent their free time.\textsuperscript{34}

The bulk of the cooking was done by the \textit{cuisinier} in the main kitchen, which usually had at least two fireplaces, lined with tiles and cast iron heat reflectors to send the heat back toward the fireplace mouth. At their mouths were hooks to hold pots and a flat iron bar to hold skillets and sauce pans. There were also several spits for roasting, usually turned by hand by the \textit{garçons de cuisine}, although in the most up-to-date eighteenth-century kitchens mechanical spits powered by dogs were used. Most of the cooking was done in the hearth, although there was also often a free-standing charcoal stove where the most delicate sauces were prepared.\textsuperscript{35}

The techniques of classic French cuisine, difficult to master today, were even more difficult to carry out in the eighteenth century, when all cooking was done over the unregulated heat of a stove or open hearth. It is not surprising then that cooks made high claims for their skill and had a reputation for being nervous and temperamental. Cooks were notorious drunkards, not just because their work made them hot and thirsty and they had easy access to the household liquor supply but also because drink offered relief from the psycho-
logical pressures of their profession. Great cooks could claim to be artists, with all the burdens of the artistic temperament. The famous seventeenth-century chef Vatel committed suicide when the eel he planned to serve at a supper for Louis XIV did not arrive in time; contemporaries like Mme. de Sévigné found this unfortunate but understandable. Their talents gave the cuisinier and officier their prestige within the household and at least a modicum of respect from society at large.

Secretaries, personal body servants, and the gens de bouche formed the aristocracy of the servant world in large noble households. They were separated not only by higher wages and the privilege of eating at a separate table in the office but also often by their literacy, savoir-faire, and more respectable social backgrounds from the proletarians of the world below stairs, the gens de livrée and servantes. The gens de livrée were defined in a royal edict of 1717 as “portiers (doorkkeepers), laquais (lackeys), porteurs de chaise (sedan chair carriers), cochers (coachmen), postillons (they rode either clinging behind or on the lead horse of a gentleman’s coach), and palefreniers (grooms).” They were distinguished by the livery they wore, which marked them as descendants of the armed retainers of the great lords of the Middle Ages. Such retainers had literally worn livery, that is, badges displaying their lords’ coat-of-arms. But by the Old Regime the badge of livery had evolved into a knot of colored ribbons or, more commonly, a piece of gold braid worn on the right shoulder; only the color, cut, and trimming of the coat identified the household to which a liveried servant belonged. This knot of gold braid was the identifying mark of a servant. Royal ordinances required domestics to wear gold braid so that in their fine clothes they would not be mistaken for gentlemen, and foreign visitors were urged to leave their braided coats at home, lest they be taken for lackeys.

The duties of the liveried lackey frequently took him outside the household, and therefore he was a symbol of its splendor in the eyes of the public at large. This made it tempting to turn his livery into a display of wealth. During the Old Regime liveries became increasingly extravagant and expensive. In the mid-eighteenth century the Comte Dufort de Cheverny spent 10,000 livres over a period of eighteen months just on the gold braid for his servants’ coats, although his pursuit of the lovely young wife of his passementier may have prompted part of this outlay. The rising cost of liveries inspired countless royal ordinances against extravagance. It also caused prudent employers to pass along the same expensive suit of livery to servant after servant, and to seek lackeys who would fit the livery rather than vice versa. In 1776 a former mayor of Caen wrote to his brother-in-law, apropos of hiring a lackey: “My wife sends you a thousand compliments and thanks for the trouble you have taken in writing her about the lackey who is available. She has not yet decided. His very small stature works against him; he would not fit the livery. When she
has decided if she will take him, she will write to you.” Men looking for work as lackeys often listed their height in their advertisements, so that potential employers would know what size they wore: “A man, age thirty-two, height 5 foot 6, knows how to serve, clean rooms, curry horses, drive a carriage and garden, desires a position suitable to his talents.”

Good looks as well as the right height could help a lackey find a position. The richest of livery, after all, would appear mean if its wearer was hunch-backed, bow-legged, or pockmarked. Therefore employers deliberately sought out men with fine figures and attractive faces. Such assets were also frequently listed in the advertisements of male servants looking for work: “A Swiss garçon, age twenty-three, very tall and with an attractive figure, knowing how to carry the post and serve, wants to find a position as domestic.”

A lackey’s appearance was so important because one of the primary functions of the gens de livrée was to act as living status symbols, as representatives of the wealth and might of their households in the eyes of society at large. Their other major function was to protect the household from invasion and insult. Like the bands of medieval armed retainers from whom they were descended, the gens de livrée were in a sense the outriders of the household, the filter through which it made contact with the outside world. They carried its messages, ran its errands, and made its purchases. They accompanied, transported, and protected its members when they ventured out, and they regulated the flow of visitors within its walls.

These roles are reflected in the duties of the various types of gens de livrée. The portier or suisse (the latter name came originally from the foreign mercenaries who filled the bands of armed retainers in the late Middle Ages) guarded the door, admitting visitors and taking deliveries from tradesmen. The coachman drove his master’s carriage, often badly (coachmen, like cooks, were notorious drunkards, although with less reason; almost every noble memoir of the ancien régime includes a harrowing account of a carriage accident caused by a drunken coachman). The postilion, standing on blocks at the back of the carriage, provided protection. Mme. de la Tour du Pin considered his job the worst of all; during long trips she always felt sorry for the postilions clinging to the back of the carriage with aching arms for hours at a stretch. The palefreniers lived in the stables and cared for the horses, carriages, and tack.

As for lackeys, they ran errands, accompanied their masters on calls, and regulated the flow of visitors within the household. During the Old Regime it was almost unheard of for a noble, at least a court noble or parlementaire, to venture outside his front door without a minimum of one liveried lackey tagging along. When the Duc de Croy paid a condolence visit to a bereaved relative but “without our people,” it was unusual enough to merit a mention in his memoirs. A revolutionary pamphlet, Avis à la livrée par un homme qui la porte, gives us a glimpse of lives of lackeys as they followed their masters on their daily social rounds:
Monsieur makes calls in the morning. This does not tire him, seated in his *cabriolet*. We are the ones exposed to the weather. . . . Dinner hour arrives. . . . For us, who have been on our feet since morning, it is a chance to sit down until dessert. . . . Quickly, quickly, someone is calling us! We must take monsieur to the theater. Here we stand on the pavement for three hours. . . . When he comes out, he goes to a *souper* or *chez des femmes*, or to gamble. This time we do not stand in the street, but we must stay in the antechamber.51

When their masters remained at home and received calls instead of making them, lackeys spent most of their time in the antechamber, stationed, often in matched pairs, in the doorway to regulate the flow of callers. The rite of calling was central to the social life of *les grands* in the ancien régime. Like the king at Versailles, *les grands* in their *hôtels* and *châteaux* spent almost every moment of their waking lives on public view; even their most intimate actions, like dressing and undressing, were occasions for the ritualized receptions of friends and favor-seekers. The very proper and *bien élevée* Laurette de Malboissière, for example, entertained her suitor while she dressed: “From eight o’clock on he was with me, assisting at my *toilette*, powdering me, putting on my shoes, attaching my bracelets, fastening my necklace. . . . At night, when Mlle. Jaillié [*her femme de chambre*] came to look for me to put me to bed, he went up with me, undoing everything that he had put on in the morning, and when my hair was fixed for the night he went away.”52

The setting for these social rites was the so-called axis of honor,53 a series of rooms, *antichambre, chambre*, and *cabinet*, found, in that order, in virtually every noble *hôtel* and *château* and in many more modest households in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (see figure 3). The *chambre* was, as its name suggests, a bedchamber, but it was also much more than that. It was the room in which petitioners were received, friends entertained, gossip exchanged, games played, and informal meals served. But not all visitors were worthy of admission to these intimacies. The unchosen were confined, along with the waiting lackeys of the chosen, in the *antichambre*, which was just what its name suggests: a waiting room for those denied entrance to the *chambre*. The final room in the series, the *cabinet*, had an opposite function. It was a private refuge from the public socializing of the *chambre*, a place where a nobleman could retreat to read, to think, to pray, in solitude.54 To be allowed into a nobleman’s *antichambre* was prestigious, to be invited into the *chambre* was even more of an honor, and to share the intimacy of the *cabinet* was the most sought-after privilege of all.

Essential to this system of socializing were the lackeys. Posted outside the doorways of each of these rooms, they controlled access to them and decided which desperate petitioners in the *antichambre* (defined in an eighteenth-century comic dictionary as “the place where servitude consoles itself through insolence and misleads through malignity”)55 would be allowed to enter the *chambre*, and of these which select few would gain the privilege of the *cabinet*.
For lackeys this duty was both pleasurable, as the quote suggests, and profitable. In theory French servants did not accept the tips, called vails, which were so much a part of life in the English country house, and which could double, triple, or even quadruple an English servant’s wages. But in fact they were not above taking bribes to allow eager favor-seekers to gain access to the inner sanctum. The Baron Pollnitz reported that John Law’s servants made fortunes that way: “Towards the Close, there was no coming to the Speech of him [Law] without Money. The Swiss must be fed for Entrance at his Gate, the Lackeys for Admittance into his Antechamber, and the Valets de Chambre, for the Privilege of access to his Presence—Chamber or Closet [the cabinet].” Ordinances forbade the gens de livrée of public officials from taking such bribes, and domestic manuals condemned the practice, but both did so in tones that suggest it was deeply entrenched.

A lackey’s life was largely one of idleness: lounging around outside a shop or theater as he waited for his employer, standing guard in the antichambre when his master received callers. Boredom and sore feet, rather than overwork, were its occupational hazards. Domestic manuals overflowed with advice to masters on filling their lackeys’ all too abundant leisure hours. Toussaint de St. Luc suggested that they be taught to read, so that they could peruse edifying religious works as they sat in their antechambers; Claude Fleury suggested that they be taught to knit or do needlework. The extremely public and visible idleness of lackeys gave all domestic servants a reputation for laziness—a reputation that not only created resentment and envy among the lower classes but also prompted many attacks by economists and philosophes on the unproductivity of male domestics in the last decades of the ancien régime.

In fact, however, the lounging lackey performed a valued function for his master. By his very presence at his master’s side or in his antechamber he signified that his employer was a man of rank who should be treated with respect and deference. And if these were not automatically forthcoming, the lackey was there to act as a protective shield to deflect the insults and blows aimed at his master and to punish the disrespectful. The police records of the Old Regime suggest that the menu peuple were extremely resentful of the wealth and power of the aristocracy. But they were understandably wary of assaulting or even insulting a powerful noble directly. The noble’s servants, however, were accessible surrogates for their masters and, with their fine clothes and proud bearing, tempting targets for abuse in their own right. Therefore assaults on servants were common. When the Parisian banker, Sr. Agasse, went debt collecting, he took his lackey along; it was of course the lackey and not Sr. Agasse who was beaten by irate debtors. And when the humble neighbors of the Duc de Luynes wished to express their resentment of his wealth and power, they doused his liveried lackey with the contents of their chamber pots—treatment they did not dare to give to the Duc himself.
Servants dealt out blows and insults in their masters' stead as well as received them. For it was the duty of a servant to defend his master's honor and to punish those who impugned it—activities a noble himself could not do without lowering his dignity. Voltaire was not the only bourgeois to be beaten by powerful nobles' lackeys for a supposed insult against their masters. In Paris in 1721, for example, the lackeys of the Portuguese ambassador to France set upon the wife of Jean Le Brun, master wheelwright; her husband had had the temerity to try to collect a debt of 460 livres owed by His Excellency. Tradesmen who dunned their noble clients, coachmen who were not quick enough in yielding the right-of-way to a nobleman's carriage, sedan-chair carriers who failed to take a noble passenger where he wanted to go—all might experience the violence of lackeys avenging insults to their masters' honor. Night after night the streets of French cities and towns rang with arguments and blows as noble carriage confronted noble carriage at street corners and the gens de livrée fought over who should yield to whom (see figure 2). Altercations were so frequent that they make the reports of M. de Marville, the hapless lieutenant-général de police of Paris in the mid-eighteenth century, dull reading. On January 8, 1745, he reported a battle outside the Comédie Italienne between the coachmen of the Mme. de Bauffremont and the Duc de Fleury over whose carriage should have first place in line. On March 17 the same place was the scene of a similar fight between the coachmen of M. de Villeprieux and the Comtesse de la Marck. On November 3 yet another coachmen's argument occurred on the same contested spot. Such battles often involved large crowds of people, for beleaguered lackeys would call on fellow members of their households and the servants of friends and clients of their masters for assistance. One famous melee of the 1720s, a fight between the lackeys of Archbishops Noailles and Dubois over whose master took precedence, left scores injured. The royal government attempted to curb this violence through innumerable edicts prohibiting the gens de livrée from carrying swords, sticks, canes, batons, or anything else that might be used as a weapon. But these laws were ineffectual, since this violence was encouraged tacitly and often openly by masters (see figure 2), and for good reason. It guaranteed them deference and respect, and so preserved their position at the apex of the social hierarchy. In a society in which power was still personal and exercised in face-to-face encounters, the lackey, both symbol and instrument of the prestige of the nobility, was essential to its survival. For their masters these laziest servants did the most important "work" of all.

The final group of servants in great noble households, those who formed the bottom of the servant hierarchy, were the unskilled female servants, the femmes de charge and the servantes. They were the only ones, apart from the cooks, whose tasks comprised what we have come to consider servant's work, that is, housework. Domestic comfort and cleanliness simply were not valued
The public role of servants. Two sedan-chair carriers argue over whose employer has precedence. The woman at right, in mask and towering headdress, is probably on her way to a ball.

in the noble households of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Few servants spent their time cleaning and scrubbing. A great household of the late seventeenth century usually had only one femme de charge, who kept track of the linen (the washing itself was done by hired laudresses), and at most two or three servantes to do the cleaning. Their work was not considered important. Domestic manuals gave copious and detailed instructions about all other aspects of servants’ work, but they were almost totally silent about the servante and her duties. In Audiger’s La Maison réglée, for example, the only reference to housecleaning is a suggestion that the servante de cuisine scrub the kitchen each morning; this could be done by “throwing water everywhere.”

Foreign travelers in France, especially the English with their advanced standards of domestic comfort, were appalled at the filthy appearance of even the greatest of noble hôtels. Philip Thicknesse wrote: “The Frenchman is always attentive to his person, and scarce ever appears but clean and well
dressed; while his house and private apartments are perhaps covered with litter and dirt, and in the utmost confusion; the Englishman, on the other hand, often neglects his external appearance, but his house is always exquisitely clean." Conversely, French travelers abroad were astonished at the cleanliness of private homes in England and Holland, and especially by the Dutch habit of thoroughly cleaning every inch of their houses once a week. In the ancien régime the French invested their servants' time in public display, not private domestic comfort.

From gentlemanly secretary to lowly servante: this then was the servant hierarchy in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century households. But we should not take either the status distinctions or the division of labor it implied too seriously. For Old Regime French households were not like English country houses of the nineteenth century, where each servant's task was strictly delimited (at Hatfield House servants' duties were spelled out in printed regulations), and the lady's maid would have felt insulted had she been asked to clean the parlor. Instead, memoirs show that even specialized servants often stepped outside their usual roles. Valets de chambre cooked for their employers when the need arose; cooks were summoned from the kitchen to run errands when no one else was available; a mere lackey who caught his master's fancy might be asked to play the role of valet de chambre and read to his employer or amuse his guests.

Old Regime households also differed from those of the nineteenth century, in that a high rank in the servant hierarchy did not give its holder the right to discipline the lower servants. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century households the butler did not tyrannize over the footmen nor the housekeeper over the parlormaid, as was true in later establishments. Instead, what little disciplining there was—and it was not much—was done by the masters themselves, who seem to have dealt with each servant individually. This approach of course could have its disadvantages. A domestic who dropped a dish within sight of his mistress received not a scolding eventually delivered through channels but instead an immediate cuff across the ear from the fair hand of Madame herself. But in general the system worked to a servant's advantage, for when he was not directly under his employer's eye he could more or less do as he pleased.

This easygoing discipline, combined with the relatively undemanding nature of servants' work, tended to make domestic service (in noble households, at least) an attractive employment option for the lower classes in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The lone servante in a bourgeois or artisan household might be overworked and bullied, but the domestics of the nobility enjoyed less taxing work and more relaxed discipline than did either the artisans and peasants of the Old Regime or servants of later periods. Also attractive was the fact that domestics derived vicarious status and ego
gratification—not to mention lucrative tips and bribes—from their roles as mediators between their masters and society at large. The chance to dole out the household patronage to fawning tradesmen, to put self-important callers in their place, to take out their aggressions in violence toward innocent passers-by doubtless helped compensate for the inevitable indignities involved in servanthood: the dependency it entailed and the ignoble nature of many of its tasks. In noble households of the patriarchal period the work itself was one of the most attractive aspects of domestic service.

The World below Stairs

Another attractive aspect of domestic service, and another way in which households of the Old Regime differed from their nineteenth-century successors, concerned servants’ living conditions. Although Paris boasted a surprisingly large number of servants who “lived out”—married couples with apartments of their own; lackeys whose masters did not have room to house them and instead arranged for their board in a nearby apartment and their meals in a nearby cabaret; men servants who hired themselves out to foreign visitors by the day, week, or month—most servants in prerevolutionary France shared a home with their masters. Being a part of someone else’s household was, after all, what defined a servant in the ancien régime. For that period the phrase “sharing a home” should be taken literally, since one of the most obvious ways in which servanthood in the Old Regime differed from that of later periods is that servants did not spend their off-duty hours in that separate and often uncomfortable world “below stairs” which was a standard feature of all large (and many small) nineteenth-century households. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries households had not yet developed that separate world of the servants’ hall which isolated domestics both from their masters and from the other, greater world outside.

This was of course especially true of the small households of the bourgeoisie and the artisanate which employed one or at most two domestics. Such servants spent almost every moment of every day in the company of their masters. The servante of a couturière, for example, worked all day side by side with her mistress and the daughters of the house in the home and shop; she ate the same food, which she and her mistress usually prepared jointly, as the rest of the family.

Even at the end of the day she did not retire to a separate area of the house. For the small cramped quarters of farmhouses and the modest apartments of the urban bourgeoisie had no separate rooms for servants. They slept wherever they could. Farm servants usually bedded down in the barn or stables; the latter often also housed male domestiques. Female servants were more likely to sleep in the house. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries servantes
usually slept on a distinct type of bed called a *lit de domestique*, a camp bed with a wooden frame and a crisscrossing of ropes (hence its other name, *lit de sangle*) which supported a straw-filled mattress. Such beds could be set up in any odd corner. Often they were put in kitchens. Marie Eleanor Davisard, daughter of a Toulousan noble, willed to Françoise Courtard, her *fille de service*, "the bed which is in my kitchen and on which she sleeps." The will of a *procureur* in the Parlement of Toulouse contained a similar provision. Servants also slept in entry foyers, in the *cabinets* off their masters’ *chambres* (in Toulouse in 1729, a priest, Durand Pujos, left to his *servante* 200 livres and “the bed where she ordinarily sleeps which is in the *cabinet* joining the chambre in my house”) and even in the toilet (*fille de service* Jeanne Perez inherited from her mistress her “bed which is actually in the toilet” in a shed at the back of the house; the bed may simply have been stored there.)

For *servantes* such arrangements clearly had their disadvantages. Not only were they cramped and unpleasant, but they also left the women extremely vulnerable to the sexual advances of the men of the household. *Servantes* had no privacy, no room to retreat to, no place to call their own. Such living conditions, however, were probably no worse than those they had experienced at home in the crowded hovels of the peasantry, and in one important way they were much better: servants, unlike peasants, always got enough to eat. In fact, the living conditions of servants in small households were not much worse than those of their employers. The farmsteads of the peasantry and the two- or three-room apartments of the urban bourgeoisie were small and cramped; employers did not give their servants privacy because they did not value it for themselves. *Servantes* of the Old Regime were therefore at least spared the psychological humiliation that was the lot of the nineteenth-century *bonnes*: the deliberately painful contrast between the solid comfort of the family areas of the house and the Spartan discomfort of their own rooms, usually unheated, unlit, poorly ventilated, lacking running water and other amenities. Such stark contrasts were impossible in the small households of the patriarchal period, when domestic life and its discontents were intimately shared by master and servant.

This was also true even in the large households of the court nobility. Admittedly the plans of chateaux and of the great hôtels built by the nobility in the Marais and other fashionable urban districts in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries seem to show a strict division between the areas of the house that were the preserve of the master and his family and those where the servants worked and slept. This division is obvious in figure 3, which shows the floor plan of a noble hôtel built in Paris early in the eighteenth century. The area between the master’s space and that of the servants was obviously the great courtyard, which functioned both as a *cour d’honneur*, where the carriages of important visitors were greeted, and a *basse-cour*, which contained the toilets, the laundry, and numerous chickens and pigs waiting to be
slaughtered. Noble of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw nothing odd about subjecting their guests to such sights and smells. On the far side of the courtyard lay the master’s domain, the main block of the house with its seemingly endless series of interconnected *antichambres, chambres,* and *cabinets.* On the other side of the court lay the servants’ world: the stables and *remises,* where the carriages were stored; the kitchen; the *office,* where the servants ate their meals and spent their leisure time; and, on the second floor, the long dormitory-like *chambres des domestiques,* where they slept.

In great noble households skilled upper servants might have rooms of their own, which they were allowed to furnish with their own possessions. Many seem to have developed a taste for luxurious furnishings. The inventory of the room of an eighteenth-century *officier* of the Maréchal de Mirepoix reveals, among the thirty-five items listed, a feather bed, a gilded armchair, a mirror, and two silver candlesticks. Those who lived in such rooms certainly could not complain of their living conditions—they enjoyed a luxury unmatched by all but the richest of the *menu peuple*.

Most servants in great noble households, however, did not have rooms of their own but instead slept in the *chambres des domestiques.* There were usually at least two of these dormitories, one for men and one for women, and often they contained separate beds for each servant. Writers of domestic manuals insisted that masters had a patriarchal duty to oversee the sexual behavior of their domestics, and that the cause of morality was best served by separating the sexes and making sure each servant slept alone. The *chambres des domestiques* rarely contained much more than beds, however; the room of the *postillons* in the household of the Maréchal de Mirepoix, for example, was furnished with two *lits de sangle,* two mattresses, two blankets, one bolster, two chairs, and a folding table. This may seem Spartan, but it was extremely comfortable by the standards of the *menu peuple* of the eighteenth century. For most servants fresh from a peasant’s cottage simply having a bed of their own was an undreamed-of luxury.

The *office* and the *chambres des domestiques,* in theory at least, made up the servants’ world in the great noble households of the patriarchal period. In practice, however, the division between the worlds of master and servant evaporated, and the two lived together almost as intimately in great hôtels as they did in the cramped quarters of the petty bourgeoisie. Most servants spent most of their time not in “their” part of the house, but instead in the masters’, specifically in the *antichambres,* regulating the traffic of callers and waiting to be summoned by their employers. There they whiled away the hours in card games and conversation, not only with their own kind but also with their master and his guests. A traveling Englishwoman, Mrs. Hester Lynch Piozzi, accustomed to the more subdued manners of her native land, where notions of domestic privacy and decorum were already highly developed, left a bemused description of what went on in the antechambers of late-eighteenth-century
Italian palazzos. It could easily have been written about French hôtels of a slightly earlier period:

It is expected that two or three of them [lackeys] at least sit in the ante-chamber, as it is called, to answer the bell . . . for the stairs, high and wide as those of Windsor Palace, all stone too, run up from the door immediately to that apartment, which is very large and very cold, with bricks [to set their feet on] only, and a brazier filled with warm wood ashes, to keep their fingers from freezing, which in summer they employ with cards, and seem but little inclined to lay them down when ladies pass through the receiving room. The strange familiarity this class of people think proper to assume, half joining in the conversation and crying oibò [oh, dear!], when the master affirms something they do not quite assent to, is apt to shock one at the beginning . . . the footman if not very seriously admonished indeed, yawns, spits, and displays what one of our travel-writers emphatically terms his flag of abomination behind the chair of a woman of quality, without the slightest sensation of its impropriety. 84

Other sources confirm Mrs. Piozzi’s description. A French etiquette book published in 1731 prescribed the proper behavior for servants in the antichambre: they should not interrupt their masters’ conversations; they should not constantly get up and walk about, passing in front of the guests; and they should not shout out greetings to friends in the courtyard below. 85 But such familiarity was only natural when master and servant spent almost every waking hour in each other’s company.

Even at night servants were not necessarily banished to “their” section of the household. Despite the existence of chambres des domestiques, many servants in great noble households, especially personal body servants, slept in antichambres or cabinets near their masters. The valet de chambre of the seventeenth-century Comte Bussy de Rabutin slept in his master’s cabinet, as did the femme de chambre of the eighteenth-century teen-ager Laurette de Malboissière. 86 The Empress Josephine was another employer who always kept her femme de chambre within earshot. When one of the splendid palazzos that housed the victorious Bonaparte and his new bride during the Italian campaign had no chambre with cabinet attached, workmen were summoned to wall off a section of the terrace next to Josephine’s bedchamber so that her maid would have a place to sleep. 87 In these circumstances the spatial division of dwellings into “upstairs” and “downstairs,” “master’s space” and “servants’ space” had little significance.

If the existence of a separate world below stairs did not necessarily isolate servants from their masters, neither did it isolate them from society at large. In nineteenth-century households the servants’ hall was a social world unto itself. Masters and other outsiders rarely penetrated its confines; delivery boys and policemen stopping in for refreshment as they walked their beats were almost
the only visitors. Servants rarely had any social contacts outside the servants’ hall, for their free time was severely limited (one free Sunday afternoon a month was the standard holiday for maids in Victorian England) and masters discouraged as much as possible ventures into the corrupting world of the industrial city. Therefore social life in the servants’ hall had a claustrophobic intensity. Petty jealousies and slights grew in its hothouse atmosphere into major grievances. Epic feuds—and love affairs—periodically swept through the world below stairs, leaving devastation in their wake.

In seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century households, however, the servants’ social world was not nearly so insulated and its passions were not nearly so intense. For one thing, Old Regime servants were much more likely than their successors to venture outside the household. A major part of their duties, after all, consisted of being publicly visible, providing public evidence of the status and dignity of the household. Old Regime servants were also more likely to spend their leisure hours outside the household. Apart from farm servants, who traditionally received the week between Christmas and New Year’s as a holiday, seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century domestics apparently had no institutionalized time off. But the easy work rhythms of Old Regime households gave them abundant leisure, and masters appear to have made little attempt to restrict their movements. Police records of the ancien régime give the impression that servants spent most of their time on the streets or in taverns.

If it was easy for servants to venture out of the household, it was also easy for outsiders to venture in. Households of the patriarchal period were infinitely penetrable. Friends, relatives, and lovers of servants; tradesmen, delivery boys, colporteurs; artisans looking for work and beggars looking for handouts swarmed through the courtyards and kitchens in endless processions. Servante Victoire Durand was seduced by a colporteur who stopped by the kitchen where she worked; servante Marie Bonefay received daily visits from her suitor; and servante Janeton Jourdan regularly shared her lit de domestique with her lover, an actor in the comédie in Aix-en-Provence.

Consequently social life below stairs was much less claustrophobic than it would become in later establishments. Of course a certain amount of socializing within the household was inevitable. Domestic servants were apparently a gregarious lot. They spent much of their leisure time together, in the kitchen or office, gossiping about their masters, drinking (that servants were overly fond of the bottle was not just one of their masters’ prejudices; when the fille de service of a président of the Parlement of Bordeaux, sent to fetch wood from the cellar, fell down the stairs and died, her fellow domestics told the police that “Janeton often took a little too much wine”), dancing (the English tourist Fanny Cradock was invited by the proprietor of her hotel in Paris to go down to the office and watch the servants dance,) and playing endless games of cards. Card-playing, for money or simply for fun, was apparently the favor-
ite pastime of domestics. Laure Junot noted in her memoirs that the servants in her mother’s household regularly stayed up all night playing cards and dominoes, and visitors to Russia observed that Catherine the Great’s servants were often so absorbed in their games that they ignored her angry calls. Servants could not hold themselves aloof from these communal recreations: L’Auteur laquais wrote that a domestique who sat reading by himself instead of joining in the conversation and card games of the antichambre would be called a “cold pissier” and shunned by all the other servants in the household.

Given this enforced sociability, love affairs, rivalries, and feuds were inevitable. The letters written by one L’Amireau, chef in a fashionable Parisian household in the 1780s, to his fiancée Rose Farcy, governess in a similar establishment, offer a glimpse of tumultuous passions of life below stairs. They show that all too often what L’Amireau called the “spirit of discord” blew its “devouring breath” over the servants’ world. At one point no one in L’Amireau’s household would speak to the valet Néron, because he was a talebearer who curried favor with his employers by informing on the other servants. At another time the femme de charge was similarly shunned because she made a show of religious devotion to please her pious mistress, “letting herself be discovered four or five times a day on her knees no doubt reciting all the funeral orations of His Grace the Archbishop of Bourges,” as L’Amireau noted in disgust. Once L’Amireau himself was cold-shouldered when the other domestics became jealous of the fact that the local curé had invited him—and him alone—to dine with him on terms of equality. L’Amireau wrote that during this period he spent his forced solitude taking long walks and thinking about his Rose. The memoirs of Mlle. Avrillon, première femme de chambre of the Empress Josephine, paint a similar picture of backstairs jealousies and intrigues. After describing her epic battle with another maid (“the most malicious woman that one could imagine”) for the coveted position of première femme de chambre to Josephine, Avrillon stated that being a servant was “like walking across a volcano” and that “there is no less diplomacy in domestic service . . . no fewer intrigues, no less hypocrisy and base jealousies than in the salon d’honneur.”

In general, however, such backstairs brouhahas were less serious in Old Regime establishments than they would be in those of the nineteenth century. Their ferocity was diluted by the fact that servants spent much of their leisure time and made many of their friendships outside the household. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries much if not most of a servant’s social life was carried on in public. Domestics pursued their favorite leisure-time activities—drinking, dancing, and card-playing—in public taverns and cabarets as well as in the privacy of the kitchen.

Another favorite pastime was dressing up in their best clothes and promenading in the streets and public parks in fashionable areas of the city. In theory access to public parks was reserved to the well-to-do. In Paris liveried lackeys
were forbidden by law to enter the Tuileries and other public gardens because the
authorities feared their violence and disliked their habit of accosting with
obscene invitations any unprotected noble ladies who passed by. But if they
were respectably dressed and behaved well, servants could penetrate even
these precincts of privilege. In fact most of the courtship of our chef L’Amireau and his Rose took place in the public gardens of Paris. L’Amireau’s letters to his love are full of missed meetings in parks and plans for future rendez-vous there: “I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you in the Tuileries at 6. I will remain there until 11,” and “today Wednesday, June 7, 1786, I was in the Luxembourg in the Grand Allée before 6 o’clock. I do not know what happened to you, but I stayed there until 7 waiting for the pleasure of seeing you” are typical passages.

Servants mingled with the respectable in other places as well. Indeed, they
adopted many of their leisure-time activities in imitation of their employers. Like their masters, lackeys frequently attended the theater, where they made a
habit of commenting loudly and unfavorably on the actors portraying domes-
tics in the productions. And like their masters, they played billiards and
gambled; Restif de la Bretonne’s Les Nuits de Paris has a marvelous descrip-
tion of a billiard parlor cum gambling den frequented by domestics.

But servants’ acquired taste for the sophisticated pleasures of their employ-
er did not prevent them from also enjoying the simpler pleasures traditional to
the menu peuple. Farm servants danced the traditional dances and sang the
traditional songs at veillées, harvest festivals, and hiring fairs. Their urban
counterparts, for all their assumed sophistication, were not above taking a
glass of wine or a hand at cards at a working-class cabaret in the company of
artisans and gagne-deniers. They too danced at carnivals and attended fairs,
laughing at the bawdy comedians and puppet shows, and gaping in wonder at
the tumblers and acrobats, the tightrope walkers and the women who danced
barefoot on hot coals, the exotic animals and the freak shows. And servants
were always prominent in the crowds at any public spectacles, Te Deums,
hangings, fireworks, and the balloon ascensions which dazzled the people of
Paris and other major cities in the eighteenth century.

The fact that servants shared so many of the recreations of the menu peuple
raises some important questions about the degree to which they were inte-
grated into the social milieus of the towns and villages in which they lived. Did
urban servants seek out the company of the artisans and day laborers who
made up the bulk of the population in towns like Toulouse and Bordeaux? How did such people regard domestic servants, those people who were similar
to them in background but whose lives and tastes often were different from
their own?

Such questions are difficult to answer. On the one hand, there is much to
suggest that servants were not well integrated into the social world of the
urban lower classes. The social universe of the eighteenth-century cities was,
after all, highly compartmentalized. Social life was carried on in the small, cohesive units of neighborhood and gild, which did not welcome strangers. It is certainly possible that servants held themselves aloof from the rest of the lower classes. Their tendency to imitate their masters—in dress, speech, mannerisms, and attitudes as well as in recreations—gave them tastes not shared by artisans and wage laborers. Servants tended to believe themselves better than the rest of the menu peuple because of their sophistication and their association with les grands. However humble their own social background and however lowly the tasks they performed, they felt themselves superior to mere artisans and day laborers who worked with their hands to support themselves. An incident recorded by the famous seventeenth-century letter-writer Mme. de Sévigné illustrates this attitude. Once at harvest time she sent her household servants to help the farm laborers trim the trees on her country estate. The servants found this insulting. One of them, Picard, refused to go. He told his mistress “that he had not left Brittany for that, that he absolutely was not a worker [qu’il n’étoit point un ouvrier], and that he preferred to go to Paris.”

Attitudes like that naturally did not endear servants to the other members of the lower classes. The latter widely disliked servants, who, as surrogates for their noble masters, were often targets of popular resentments and hatreds otherwise too dangerous to express. The lower classes resented domestics for the violence they so often exercised on behalf of their masters, and for the power their control of their masters’ purse gave them over tradesmen and shopkeepers. And they disliked them for their own sake as well. They resented their fine clothes and superior manners, their relatively high salaries, their abundant leisure time, and the security they enjoyed of having their food and lodging always provided for them. But above all they resented their arrogance, their bland assumption that their association with les grands and their knowledge of the ways of the fashionable world made them superior to a mere artisan or laborer. The latter, by contrast, believed that servants had absolutely no justification for feelings of superiority. Servants were, after all, mere lackeys who had surrendered the independence that was the birthright of a free man to put themselves under the yoke of a master.

These differing attitudes frequently inspired clashes between servants and other members of the lower classes. In Bordeaux in 1741, for example, a surgeon sent his two domestiques to place an order with a ship’s carpenter. Their arrogant behavior annoyed the carpenter’s apprentices, who called them “fiches laquays”; the servants responded that the apprentices were themselves subordinate to the will of a master, just as they were. A fist-fight ensued, with serious injuries on both sides. Such incidents were all too common in the police records of the Old Regime. Their fellow townspeople punished servant arrogance with verbal and physical insults; servants responded with the violence so central to their social role.
Yet it would be a mistake to paint the relationships between domestics and the rest of the *menu peuple* solely in terms of violent confrontation. Servants, after all, came from the same social milieu as other members of the lower classes; often they had relatives who were artisans and day laborers, and of course such people often had relatives who were domestics. And the penetrability of the average ancien régime household gave servants many opportunities to meet and form friendships with their fellow townsmen. The memoirs of Jacques-Louis Ménétra, an eighteenth-century Parisian glassworker, allow us glimpses of such relationships. Ménétra himself once indignantly refused an offer of employment as a servant, announcing, "Monsieur, I have never worn livery and I never hope to wear it," but he counted among his best friends a *maître d'hôtel* and an *officier*, and while working in great households, he made friends with the *maître d'hôtel* and the *valets de chambre*, who entertained me in the *office* and, since I was a fellow countryman, invited me along in all their pleasures." Police records yield similar vignettes: a Parisian *sergent de guet* goes drinking and picks up girls with his best friend, a lackey; a young *servante* entrusts all her belongings to an artisan and his wife when she is forced to return to her family in the country. But our best evidence of the friendships between servants and the *menu peuple* comes from marriage contracts. These not only show that servants frequently married into the artisanate, but also that they often asked artisans to act as witnesses at the signing of their marriage contracts. Of servants' marriage contracts signed in Toulouse in 1727–29 and 1787–89, 67 percent had witnesses other than relations or the employers of the couple, and of these 51 percent were artisans, shopkeepers, or day laborers; only 8 percent were fellow servants. Thus when Guillaume Faure, *domestique*, signed his marriage contract with the daughter of a *bras­sier* in 1789, he invited a mason, presumably a friend of his, to act as witness. Two cloggers, also presumably friends, witnessed the signing of the contract between François Pons, *cocher*, and Jeanne Lamourelle, *servante*.

These social contacts suggest that while antagonisms did exist between domestics and the rest of the *menu peuple*, relations between them could also be friendly. In the ancien régime the social lives of servants were clearly not confined to the world below stairs. They might be most comfortable in the company of fellow domestics, whether those of their own households or those of other establishments in the neighborhood whom they met in cafes to share drinks and cards and to boast about their good looks, fine clothes, and the grandeur and importance of their employers. But servants also inhabited the world of their masters, with whom they lived on terms of intimacy unthinkable in a later age. And they were, despite inevitable antagonisms, surprisingly well integrated into the social world of the urban *menu peuple*. In prerevolutionary France being a servant was not the isolating experience it would become in the nineteenth century.
The Rise of Domesticity and Its Effects on Servants

On May 31, 1781, the Marquise de Bombelles, lady-in-waiting to Madame Elizabeth, great-aunt of King Louis XVI, wrote to her husband, the French ambassador to the Holy Roman Empire:

The court is a dog of a place. I shall long regret the sweet and tranquil life I led at Ratisbon [Regensburg, where her husband was stationed], and I feel certain that my lot should have been to be a good wife [une bonne femme] occupied solely with her husband, her children, and her household. For the pleasures of the court, of what is called good taste [le bon ton] have no attraction for me, and I have too bourgeois a way of thinking for that place.¹¹¹

The Marquise was not alone in her dislike for the court and her preference for the simple joys of family life. The 1770s and 1780s were the years when the French haut monde turned away from public socializing and display to focus their emotional energies on the more private pleasures of family life. Richard Sennett might have labeled the period the “fall of public man” or at least of the public noble.

Two generations of the ducal family of de Croy illuminate this development. The first Duc de Croy, born in 1718, was a noble of the traditional pattern.¹¹² His private family life was almost nonexistent. He mentions his wife, whom he married in a match arranged by their families in 1741, in only two paragraphs of the four volumes of memoirs he wrote about his life, and these dealt largely with her ancestry and the fact that the king and queen had deigned to sign the couple’s marriage contract. The Duc's children got equally short shrift—he obviously viewed them simply as means of perpetuating the family name. The emotional focus of his life was his public career, especially his intrigues at court, which he detailed at inordinate length. But the second Duc, born in 1743, was (at least as described by his puzzled father) a different sort of person. He too had a marriage arranged for him, but he astounded his father by promptly falling in love with his bride. She returned his affection, and the young couple devoted themselves to each other and to their children, shunning the court in favor of private domestic bliss.

This pattern was repeated in scores of noble families as the Old Regime drew to its close. Noble girls like Laurette de Malboissière dreamed of marrying for love: “I would wish, if I were married, that my husband occupied himself only with me, that he loved only me . . . that he lived with me forever more like a lover than a husband.”¹¹³ Court beauties like the Marquise de Bombelles turned themselves into bonnes femmes, devoting their lives to raising their children and running their households. And noblemen like the sec-
The first floor (right) and second floor (left) of a typical Parisian hôtel of the early eighteenth century. Note the rooms arranged along the axis of honor (antichambre, chambre, and cabinet), and the dormitorylike chambres des domestiques over the stable.

and Duc de Croy abandoned political careers for the pleasures of private life.

The nobility's discovery of domesticity necessarily had great impact on their households and servants. The very purpose of the household changed. Hôtels ceased to be backdrops for the public socializing and display that had characterized the noble life style in the previous century; they became instead comfortable settings for the private pleasures of family life. This change was reflected in the arrangement of rooms within the household. Noble hôtels built in the years immediately preceding the French Revolution showed a much clearer separation of public and private space within the household than was usual in earlier buildings. Figure 3 is the plan of an early eighteenth-century hôtel, taken from Charles Antoine Jombert's *Architecture moderne, ou L'Art de bien bâtir pour toutes sortes de personnes*, published in 1764.
The first and second floors of the house of the Marquis d'Argenson, built on the Champs Elysées in 1780. By then the axis of honor, so notable in earlier houses, had disappeared; in its place were single-purpose rooms like the salon de compagnie and the cabinet de travaille.

Figure 4 shows the house of the minister d'Argenson, built in 1780 on the Champs Elysées, and published in Johann Karl Krafft and Pierre Nicolas Ransonette's *Plans, coupes, élévations de plus belles maisons et des hôtels construits à Paris . . .* in 1802. The earlier plan shows the traditional mingling of public and private space. On the ground floor the salle à manger opens into an antichambre and chambre, and on the first floor these rooms,
used for both the private functions of dressing, sleeping, and contemplation and the public function of receiving visitors, retain their traditional arrangement along the "axis of honor." But in the later house the public spaces of salle à manger and salon de compagnie (note this new label for the salon, which emphasized the public nature of the room) are more distinctly separated from the private space of boudoir, chambre à coucher, and cabinet de toilette or de travaille. This new group of private rooms, arranged more informally than before, is clearly not intended for the social ritual of calling. The chambre has become unequivocally a chambre à coucher; the cabinet is clearly labeled a dressing room or study.

An atmosphere of informal though luxurious comfort characterized both the public and private spaces of these newly divided houses. In the public space entertaining became much more relaxed and informal. By the 1780s the ritual of calling was on the decline and its essential room, the antichambre, was on the verge of extinction (almost none appear in the later house plans published in Krafft and Ransonette). It was replaced by rooms suitable for more informal entertaining—card rooms, billiard rooms, picture galleries—arranged so that guests could circulate freely among them without liveried lackeys to bar the way. The other main social ritual of the ancien régime, the formal banquet, was also on the decline by the 1780s. It was replaced by the smaller and more informal and intimate souper, popularized by fashionable hostesses like the portraitist Mme. Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun. In her memoirs she described one of her popular soupers à la grecque. The guests wore informal clothes designed to imitate classical draperies. The food was informal too, much less costly and abundant than that served at traditional banquets. Mme. Vigée-Lebrun gave her guests only chicken and fish, a plate of vegetables and a salad, plus honey cakes and grapes for dessert; all of which, she noted triumphantly, cost less than fifteen livres. This was a far cry from the profusion of dishes and emphasis on expensive ingredients at earlier noble tables.

A similar emphasis on informal and comfortable luxury marked the private rooms of the new hôtels. In their chambres and boudoirs light pastel colors replaced the deeper shades of an earlier era; printed cottons and toiles de Jouy replaced brocades and damasks. Lighter and simpler neoclassical furniture, straight-lined but comfortable, replaced the overstuffed curves of rococo. For the first time bedrooms were adequately heated, by means of complicated ventilating systems and free-standing stoves. And for the first time bathrooms and indoor flush toilets were an integral part of the private spaces of the household (see figure 4). The latter convenience was often called the lieux à l'anglaise in a backhanded compliment to the country that had pioneered modern affectionate family life and its comfortable domestic setting. A l'anglaise was the fashion in the Parisian beau monde of the 1780s in everything from dresses to horse-racing to the liberal politics of the Duc d'Orléans. A l'anglaise, too, was the nobility's new-found devotion to domesticity
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and their determination to turn their hôtels into comfortable settings for the joys of family life.

The reorientation of noble life styles from public display to private domesticity and the new emphasis on comfort within the household had profound effects on servants' work. Servants like lackeys whose main tasks involved the public "display" aspects of noble life found themselves growing obsolete. In the last years of the Old Regime the lackey's role as public representative of his household was limited first, by a new code of noble behavior which emphasized civility rather than the violence that lackeys had traditionally exercised on behalf of their masters, and second, by their employers' determination to keep their newly important private lives private. Noble families no longer wanted the sort of publicity that liveried lackeys provided. Mme. Vigée-Lebrun complained in her memoirs that when a female friend borrowed her carriage and liveried coachman to keep a rendezvous with her lover, the finance minister Calonne; Mme. Lebrun was afraid everyone would see the livery and conclude it was she who was Calonne's mistress. A noblewoman of an earlier era would not have been so concerned about public revelations of her private life. Also, the decline of the ritual of calling and the disappearance of the antichambre robbed lackeys of their major duty within the household, that of regulating traffic along the axis of honor. Therefore it is not surprising that the number of lackeys employed in great households gradually declined during the Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century.

The work of chefs, too, was affected by the changes in the life style of the nobility. As the formal banquet gradually gave way to the more informal souper, the tasks of cooks became simpler. Not only were fewer dishes served at these meals, but the food itself was less elaborate. The last decades of the Old Regime saw the development of the first "nouvelle cuisine," a cuisine that emphasized simple rather than costly ingredients and the natural flavors of food rather than elaborate sauces. The new emphasis on naturalness and simplicity led to a new appreciation of the simple cooking traditionally done in modest French homes—what was coming to be called in this period "cuisine bourgeoise." This cooking was the creation of women, housewives and their servantes, as the title of Menon's famous cookbook, La Cuisinière bourgeoise, suggests. Published initially in 1746, this was the first cookbook to give recipes for the simple traditional dishes prepared in bourgeois and peasant homes, and it was also the first cookbook designed specifically for female cooks. Thus the new simplicity in French cuisine encouraged the replacement of male chefs by female cuisinières, a process that by the 1780s put women in the kitchens of most French households except those of the highest court nobility.

Thus the new domesticity changed the composition of great noble households. It also probably changed servants' patterns of work. It seems likely that in the last years of the Old Regime servants spent more of their time doing housework, especially cleaning, than they had ever done before, and that they
worked harder than servants had in the past. For the nobility's new-found notions of domestic comfort postulated a serene backdrop for family life: a house exquisitely clean and run to perfection, with everyone's slightest wish anticipated and provided for. All this was impossible without much hard work on the part of servants. This is reflected in the domestic manuals of the period. An example is Jean-Charles Bailleul's *Moyens de former un bon domestique*, published in 1812. In sharp contrast to the domestic manuals of the seventeenth century, Bailleul's book emphasized the private rather than the public role of servants (it was subtitled *La Manière de faire le service de l'intérieure d'une maison*). For Bailleul servants' work was housework pure and simple. His book is full of the sort of household hints that one would expect in such a publication but were so conspicuous by their absence in earlier domestic manuals: advice on how to beat carpets, how to lay fires so that they do not smoke, how to make beds so that the sheets will not wrinkle. His is also the first French domestic manual that I know of to give a detailed, hour-by-hour schedule of a servant's working day. The schedule stretched from dawn to well after midnight, and would have appalled the domestics of the easygoing households of an earlier era. Bailleul constantly emphasized that servants must work hard and not waste time on the job; to do so was to rob a master as surely as by stealing his pocketwatch. In the domestic manuals of the patriarchal period the qualities most desirable in a servant were loyalty and obedience. But for Bailleul a good servant was one who had the skills necessary for his job and never wasted a minute.

The rise of domesticity also had a great impact on servants' nonworking hours. It created that separate world below stairs where servants spent their lives in the nineteenth century. For a key element of the new noble life style was privacy. Their desire to keep their private lives private meant that they had to conduct them out of the sight of curious servants. This inspired the efforts to keep domestics at a distance which were such a novel and significant feature of late eighteenth-century households.

The techniques for keeping servants apart from the private life of their employers were many and various. One involved the creation, for the first time, of a genuinely separate servants' space within the household. In the new houses built in the 1770s and 1780s the areas in which servants worked—the cuisine and the office—were placed as far away as possible from the family quarters. Even in earlier buildings these areas had usually been detached from the main body of the house and relegated to separate wings across the cour, along with the stables, the toilets, and other unsightly—and smelly—necessities (see figure 3). But by the end of the eighteenth century the kitchen and office were distanced still farther: they were often buried in the cellars of the house. Similarly, the servants' sleeping quarters were separated as far as possible from the family living areas, often in the attic or cellar. And now servants were actually expected to sleep there, instead of on a lit de domes-
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tique in their employers' garde-robe or cabinet. Another change indicating the new value placed on privacy was the substitution of separate rooms for each servant for the traditional dormitory arrangement of the servants' quarters.

Yet another aspect of the new concern for privacy was an effort to limit the occasions when family members would come face to face with the servants going about their work. This was done by means of the backstair or servants' stairs, which allowed domestics to enter bedrooms of their employers without passing through the main staircase and corridors used by the family and its guests. The backstairs were a late eighteenth-century invention. The first esca-lier de service clearly labeled as such appeared in a house designed by the great architect Ledoux in 1770. It ran from the basement kitchen and office to the dining room on the rez-de-chaussée, thence to the bedroom corridor on the second floor, and finally to the attics where the servants themselves slept. Thus servants could go about all their work and go from their work areas to their bedrooms without ever intruding in the "family areas" of the house.

Another change in the layout of houses that helped to banish servants from the family quarters was the elimination of the antichambre. No longer did crowds of noisy lackeys lounge around gossiping and playing cards as they awaited a shouted summons from their employers. Now they had to keep to the entresol (a special story built between the main floors of the house as a refuge for domestics) or to the cuisine and office until another late-eighteenth-century invention, the bell, indicated that they were wanted. Still other new inventions helped eliminate the occasions when servants had to be summoned. For example, the athénienne allowed the mistress of the house to brew her tea herself, on a sort of tripod over an open fire, and the dumbwaiter enabled a master to dine without the presence of servants. Louis XV even had installed in his private rooms at Versailles a "flying table" which rose from the basement completely set for dinner.

A final method of keeping servants at a distance was to make certain that during the few times when they were allowed to venture into their masters' presence they remained as inconspicuous as possible. Late-eighteenth-century domestic manuals like Bailleul's emphasized, for the first time, that servants must behave prudently when in the company of their masters. They should not join in their masters' conversations, as had been usual in earlier periods; instead, they should speak only when spoken to. They should keep a poker face, and not laugh at the jokes or cry at the sad stories they overhear. They should even make every attempt to minimize the physical traces of their presence, handling wineglasses by the stem so that they leave no fingerprints, wearing gloves to avoid sweaty palm prints on the furniture, and changing clothes after working in the stables to prevent offensive body odors. Servants should also constantly strive to be even-tempered, and not inflict changes of mood or personal problems on their masters. And finally, servants should above all be
discreet. As Bailleul noted, it was unavoidable that they know a great deal about the private lives of their employers, for they "have access to our most secret places." But they should try to curb their natural curiosity about their masters’ doings, and never, never reveal the secrets of the household to outsiders.¹³²

For proponents of the new domesticity servants were a necessary evil. It was impossible to create the comfortable domestic environment necessary for a happy family life without them, yet their presence inevitably intruded on the privacy that was a prerequisite for familial happiness. Therefore the ideal servant was efficient, hard-working, and above all inconspicuous, if not completely invisible—as one early-nineteenth-century domestic manual put it, "an intelligent and obedient machine costing 200 francs per year."¹³³ This image of the servant as a machine to do housework is striking, both for its repudiation of the close and personal master-servant relationships of the past and for its anticipation of the future, when actual machines for housework would finally guarantee the inviolability of domestic space and doom the servant to extinction.

The Rewards of Service

Domestic service was in many ways a less attractive employment option in the last half of the eighteenth century than it had been in earlier periods. The changes engendered by the rise of domesticity—the longer hours, the stricter discipline, the sharper separation between master and servant—made the occupation both more laborious and more humiliating. But for most servants these unattractive features of domestic service were probably offset by another important change: a spectacular rise in servants’ wages.

In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth century servants’ wages were in general so low as to be almost nonexistent. Indeed, many servants did not receive cash wages at all. Instead they were hired à récompense: they received for their work their food and board and some sort of gift—an apprenticeship, a dowry, a legacy—at the end of their labors. Such practices were natural to a patriarchal society which viewed domestic labor of servants not as a commodity to be exchanged for cash but instead as a duty a servant owed to his master. Hiring à récompense was almost universal for farm servants, and was also widespread for house servants in provincial cities like Toulouse and Bordeaux, at every social level from artisan to noble households. The wills of the period indicate how prevalent it was. In Toulouse and Bordeaux in the years from 1727 to 1729, 173 employers left legacies for their domestics, and in 21 of these cases the gift was specifically stated to be in lieu of wages.¹³⁴ Typical were the wills of Dlle. Jacquette de Pezan, daughter of a Toulousan noble, who left to Marguerite Payre, “her servant who has no fixed wages,” the bed she slept in and an annual pension of forty livres, and that of Dlle. Toinette de
Lugis, widow of a *marchand droguiste* in the same city, who left a bed, household goods, and ten livres to Anne "who is near the testatrix and serves her without any retribution or wages but only for her expenses."\(^\text{135}\)

The alternative to hiring à *récipense* was hiring à *gages*, for a yearly wage. But even this was far from modern wage labor. For one thing, servants' wages were quite often paid partly in kind; François Louradour was hired in 1705 as a farm servant by the Chevalier de la Renaudie, a minor Toulousan noble, for what was recorded in the Chevalier's *livre de raison* as a yearly wage of "eighteen livres, two shirts, and one of my old hats."\(^\text{136}\) Servants' wages often went unpaid for long periods of time. Again the experience of François Louradour provides an illustration. He was hired in 1705 for eighteen livres, but he received no cash until six years later, when he left his job to marry. Until then François was paid only in kind and in petty sums for pocket money: in May 1705 his master bought him a pair of shoes costing three livres, and five lengths of rough cloth for five livres; in August he received thirty *sous* to spend at the fair of St. Jean; in September he got another sixteen *sous* and one *liard* to buy a hide to make a pair of breeches, and so forth.\(^\text{137}\) This pattern of providing for servants' immediate needs but allowing their wages to fall into arrears was prevalent before 1750 in all types of households, even great noble establishments in Paris, and at all levels of the servant hierarchy. Guillaume Escaffié, a country *curé*, paid his maidservants in this manner, and so did the noble Sentou Dumont. The latter even paid his son's tutor, a respectable *bourgeois*, in this way.\(^\text{138}\)

In practice, therefore, the wages for which a servant was theoretically hired bore little relationship to what he actually received. Figure 5 shows the theoretical wages of four different types of servants from 1591 to 1820.\(^\text{139}\) This shows, first of all, that servants' wages tended to vary by sex. Male servants always received more than women, even if they did the same kind of work. In the mid-eighteenth-century household of Marquis de Barneval, for example, male cooks earned 120 livres per year, while *cuisinières* got exactly half that.\(^\text{140}\) This differential, incidentally, apparently annoyed at least one female servant. Nougaret's *Tableau mouvant de Paris* tells the story of a *servante* who dressed in men's clothes and got a job as a groom. Forced to disclose her sex when accused of fathering a fellow servant's child, she explained to the magistrate that, "since women servants earned less than men, and since she was strong enough to do men's work, a natural self-interest prompted her to dress in men's clothes."\(^\text{141}\) Wages also varied by skill: skilled upper servants like *maîtres d'hôtel* and *femmes de chambre* always earned more than mere *domestiques* and *servantes*. Wages tended to vary too by location. Of the three cities studied, servants' salaries were lowest in economically stagnant Toulouse, higher in booming Bordeaux, and highest of all in Paris, where the munificent salaries paid in great noble households set the wage level for the occupation as a whole. In the 1770s a stable boy earned around 60 livres in Toulouse, 72 in Bordeaux, and anywhere from 120 to 450 livres in Paris.\(^\text{142}\)
But in practice these variations mattered little in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries. Except for skilled male upper servants, wages were uniformly extremely low, much lower than those of any other occupation. The real compensation for servants was not their cash wages, which so often went unpaid, but the food and shelter they received in return for their labor. These items were the largest elements in all lower-class budgets of the period. But even if the cash value of this food and shelter is added, servants' wages remained meager. Figure 6 shows a comparison of the wages of an unskilled male servant, and his wages with food and shelter added, to the
salary of a journeyman laborer. Throughout the seventeenth century servants' salaries were regularly lower than those of journeymen, and even with the value of food and shelter added they were only slightly higher than those of other occupations. Therefore in terms of financial rewards domestic service was not an especially attractive occupation in the seventeenth century.

In the eighteenth century, however, this situation changed dramatically. As figure 5 shows, servants' wages rose over the course of the century, showing a mild rise in the years from 1730 to 1750, a slight check in the 1750s and 1760s, and then a spectacular rise in the 1770s and 1780s. Of course, wages in general
rose in the eighteenth century. As C. E. Labrousse's famous calculations have shown, they were 11 percent higher in the period from 1771 to 1789 than they were in his base years of 1726–41, and from 1785 to 1789 they were 22 percent higher than the base. But servants' wages rose even more than those of other occupations. Those of unskilled female servants were around 40 percent higher in 1771–89 than they had been in 1726–41, and for 1785–89 the figure is over 100 percent. Wages for unskilled male servants show even greater rises: 46.7 percent for 1771–89 and 109 percent for 1785–89.

Furthermore, by the last decades of the Old Regime these wages were actually paid to servants. From around 1750 on domestic service was wage labor in fact as well as definition. The practice of hiring servants à récompense died out in the course of the eighteenth century. Legacies in lieu of wages almost completely disappear from wills by the 1780s; of the wills I read from Toulouse and Bordeaux for the years 1787 to 1789, only two had such provisions. In the course of the eighteenth century the practice of allowing servants' wages to fall into arrears also disappeared. Livres de raison from the last decades of the century show a consistent pattern of regular cash payments to domestics.

The reasons for these changes are hard to pinpoint. The wage rise may simply reflect the fact that salaries in this newly monetized occupation were finding their true level. Or they may reflect the scarcity of skilled male upper servants, those symbols of nobility, as the growing scorn accorded to servants in the last decades of the Old Regime kept men of respectable backgrounds from entering the occupation. The high salaries paid these sought-after domestics may have raised the wage levels of the occupation as a whole. As for the monetization of servants' work, the economic growth during the eighteenth century, with the spread of the market economy and its values, was probably the main factor at work.

Whatever their causes, the monetization of servants' work and the rise in servants' salaries combined to make domestic service a financially attractive occupation for the lower classes by the end of the eighteenth century. As figure 6 shows, servants' salaries were by then approaching those of other occupations, and when the value of food and shelter, increasingly expensive over the course of the century, is added, servants' salaries were strikingly superior. By 1789 journeymen, squeezed between stagnant salaries and a rapidly rising cost of living, were finding it difficult to make ends meet. But servants were increasingly prosperous, and moreover, since their food and shelter were provided, they could save most of their salaries to invest in their future. This prosperity probably was what continued to attract people to the occupation despite increasingly unattractive working conditions and the growing public scorn of servants. Domestic service was the one occupation that gave a member of the lower classes some hopes of realizing his or her dreams of a better future.