Lady Rachel Russell was baptized Rachel Wriothesley on September 19, 1637, at the ancient parish church of St. Peter in the village of Titchfield in southern Hampshire. She was the third child and second daughter of Thomas Wriothesley, the fourth earl of Southampton, and his French wife, Rachel Massiue de Ruvigny de la Maison Fort (see the illustrations). The parish church, which dates back to the late seventh century, had been in the patronage of the earls of Southampton since the mid-sixteenth century and was adorned by marks of their preeminence. In the chapel of St. Peter behind the baptismal font a massive mausoleum, commissioned by the second earl and erected in 1594, held the remains of Rachel’s English ancestors—the first three earls of Southampton and their wives. On the south wall of the chapel a figure carved in white marble of a little girl, dressed in adult clothes with a ruff at her neck, memorialized Lady Mary Wriothesley, Rachel’s aunt, who had died in 1615 at the age of four years. This physical setting gave abundant evidence of the aristocratic status of Rachel’s English lineage.

Rachel’s parents had been married for just over three years when she was born. Their wedding was celebrated not in England but at the most important Huguenot church near Paris, the Temple at Charenton, two leagues from the city on the banks of the Marne River. The contrast with the parish church at Titchfield was striking. The temple had been built about 1623 on an estate formerly belonging to a minister of the government; the estate had been granted by the king to a group of Huguenots who had petitioned for a place of worship convenient to Paris, following the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598. The interior of the temple was described by John Evelyn, the diarist, who visited it in 1644, as a “fair and spacious room.” The walls were decorated with instructive paintings of the Tables of the Law, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Creed. The pulpit and communion table were enclosed in an area which also contained seats for the elders. The remainder of the congregation, which numbered about three thousand, sat on low stools.
All sang Psalms, and the children received rigorous training in catechism. The temple symbolized Rachel’s French Huguenot lineage just as the setting of her baptism did her English heritage.³

Rachel’s mother and father were a disparate pair in terms of personality, national origin, and family background. Southampton was short, reserved, and “much inclined to melancholic.”⁴ Madame de la Maison Fort was “somewhat taller” than the average Frenchwoman, and of striking beauty with black hair, “excellent eyes,” and a “sweet and affable,” even “merry,” disposition.⁵ Neither partner was young when they married in 1634. At thirty-one, Madame de la Maison Fort had been a widow for nine years; she had no surviving children from her first marriage. For Southampton, five years her junior, it was a first marriage. Madame de la Maison Fort came from a French family of noble status, but one whose attainments and wealth were rather modest. Southampton, on the other hand, was an English earl, whose great-grandfather had established the family fortune and social and political position in the sixteenth century. At the time of his marriage, however, Rachel’s father had no outstanding accomplishments of his own; they were still to come. Moreover, Madame de la Maison Fort was a devout Huguenot, whose male relatives were prominent leaders in the Huguenot political and religious community, whereas Southampton was a member of the Anglican church.

Thomas Wriothesley’s ancestors had first come to public view in the fifteenth century. At that time, they spelled their name Writh or Wrythe. They advanced to some prominence as heralds in the newly established College of Arms. Sir John Writh became third garter king-of-arms in 1483 and served both Edward IV and Henry VII in diplomatic missions and court ceremonials. His two sons, Thomas and William, also made their marks as heralds. As Thomas prospered he abandoned the simple name of Writh and took on the aristocratic-sounding name of Wriothesley, claiming descent from a family of that name which had lived at the time of King John. His brother William followed suit. It was this William’s son, Thomas, the great-grandfather of Rachel’s father and the man whose given name he bore, who established the family’s landed wealth and tradition of political service.⁶

Educated at Cambridge University and trained in the law at Gray’s Inn, Rachel’s great-great-grandfather, Thomas Wriothesley, became an attorney in the Court of Common Pleas and a client of Thomas Cromwell. As Cromwell’s man, he took a prominent role in the dissolution of the monasteries. Although he probably remained Catholic,⁷ he conducted himself in ways that pleased the king, and Henry VIII rewarded him with land, offices, and titles. Thus, in 1537 Thomas Wriothesley acquired the Abbey of Titchfield and nearly five thousand
acres of land connected with it. Titchfield, a Premonstratensian abbey,
was located nine miles southeast of Southampton in Hampshire, close to
Fareham and Portsmouth. It was notable for its great library of theologi­
cal, classical, and humanistic works. Thomas received many other
manors, among them Micheldever and Stratton, two of the richest
manors formerly belonging to Hyde Abbey. He also acquired property
in London, a house and land along Holborn, and Bloomsbury manor,
for which he paid £1,666. These properties became significant in the
story of Rachel Russell.

Almost immediately after acquiring Titchfield Abbey, Wriothesley
undertook to transform it into a handsome house. By 1543 the recon­
struction project was completed, John Leland, the antiquary, reporting
that it was a “right stately house...having a goodly gate and a conduit
casteled in the midle of the court of it.” No monarch visited Titchfield
during the first earl’s lifetime, as he had hoped would happen, but by the
time the fourth earl brought his French bride to it in 1634, three
monarchs—Edward VI, Elizabeth I, and Charles I—had stayed there. It
was in this great house, located about a mile to the north of the village
of Titchfield, that Rachel was probably born on September 14, 1637,
and where she mostly lived until 1654.

Thomas Wriothesley received offices and titles as well as land.
For example, he held the post of lord chancellor, and in 1544 King
Henry VIII raised him to the peerage as Baron Wriothesley of Titchfield.
In compliance with Henry’s deathbed wish, King Edward VI made him
first earl of Southampton in 1547. Although he suffered setbacks during
the brief and politically volatile era of Edward VI, at the time of his
death in 1550 the first earl had successfully established the social, eco­
nomic, and public position of the Southampton family. Not until
Rachel’s father rose to high political office did another member equal
the first earl in prestige and service.

The political and economic prospects of the Southampton family
faltered under the second earl, Henry, a child of five when his father
died. Raised in the Catholic faith, Henry remained Catholic when
Elizabeth I became queen in 1558 and the state religion changed again.
Married to a Catholic woman, Mary Browne, the daughter of Anthony
Browne, first viscount Montagu, he translated his religious convictions
into political intrigues, which landed him in the Tower in 1571 for two
years and again in 1581. His treasonable activities destroyed the pub­
lic role of the family that his father had established.

The second earl also imperiled the financial position of the family
by lavish spending on hospitality, house-building, and a retinue that
numbered over a hundred. When he died in 1581, he left instructions in
his will for erecting the great family mausoleum in the parish church of
Lady Rachel Russell

St. Peter where Rachel was baptized. The plans were so extravagant that his executors found it necessary to modify them, but the final design executed by Gerard Johnson, a Flemish sculptor, was still magnificent—a two-tiered structure decorated with figures carved from marble and alabaster.¹²

Henry, the third earl of Southampton, rescued the family from the compromising situation created by his father by converting to Anglicanism. The conversion opened the way for him and his descendants once again to play a genuine role in England’s political and social life. It also opened opportunities for them to be drawn to Puritan influences that were growing in the Anglican church. The earl’s later political views and actions reflected his strong commitment to Puritan values. It was these values and views that Rachel’s father inherited.

The third earl has won renown as a lover of literature and as a patron of writers, especially Shakespeare.¹³ Southampton was also a bibliophile. About 1615 he purchased the library of William Crashaw, a distinguished Puritan divine and fellow of St. John’s College.¹⁴ These books, added to others that he had assembled, amounted to about two hundred rare manuscripts—sermons, homilies, works by early church fathers, and Scholastics—and some two thousand books.¹⁵ Southampton intended to present the collection to St. John’s College as the foundation of a library to be built there, a step carried out by his widow and Rachel’s father in 1616 and 1635.¹⁶ Thus, Rachel herself did not grow up in proximity to this magnificent library, but her father did. Surely the presence of such a collection influenced his intellectual development.

The third earl’s political career was checkered. A handsome young man,¹⁷ he attracted the attention of Queen Elizabeth I, only to forfeit her regard by having a love affair with one of her ladies-in-waiting, Elizabeth Vernon, whom he married in 1598. Following close upon this episode was his involvement in the Essex Rebellion in 1601, a far more serious matter. The uprising was a fiasco. Southampton was arrested, found guilty, and sentenced to die. But his life was spared, and he was imprisoned in the Tower until 1603, when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England.¹⁸ Recalling Essex’s friendship, James released Southampton, restored his title with its former precedence, made him a Knight of the Garter, appointed him captain of the Isle of Wight, and bestowed on him the farm of the Sweet Wine Customs, which greatly enriched him. For years Southampton benefited from the favor of the king. For example, in February 1608 certain privileges regarding his Hampshire property were confirmed, such as freedom from interference by the sheriff and exemption from tallage,
aids, geld, and scot. These privileges remained with the property when Rachel inherited it much later.

The third earl, however, never became an intimate of the king nor of the king’s first minister, Robert Cecil, earl of Salisbury. Failing to win the office and status he coveted, he turned his restless spirit to the management of his estate. He took steps to enhance the value of his London properties and to facilitate their later expansion. In 1613 he began the practice of leasing plots for building in Bloomsbury, and in 1616 he bought part of the manor of St. Giles in the Fields, which extended the estate along Holborn. In 1617 the king agreed to extend the liberties of the earl’s house in Holborn, now called Southampton House, down the east side of Chancery Lane. These were properties that Rachel would also inherit.

After Salisbury’s death in May 1612, Southampton played a larger political role, becoming a leader of the aristocratic Protestant faction at court. From 1619 to 1621 he angered the court because of his opposition to the pro-Spanish policy and the projected marriage of Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta, and in March 1621 King James placed him in the custody of John Williams, dean of Westminster. Thanks to Williams’ intervention with the king, Southampton won release by the end of August 1621. But his royal pensions were suspended and, despite his efforts and those of friends, were not reinstated.

By 1623 Southampton’s relations with the king and with Buckingham and Prince Charles had improved, for the latter two had reversed themselves and now favored a war policy. When England and Holland signed a treaty in 1624 under which the English were to raise four regiments to serve under the Dutch in the Thirty Years War, Southampton took on the command of one of the regiments. He and his eldest son and heir, James, Lord Wriothesley, left for Holland in August 1624. Shortly thereafter both men were stricken with fever, and James succumbed. On the journey home with his son’s body, the third earl died, probably of a heart attack, on November 10 at Bergen-op-zoom. That is how Thomas, the earl’s second son and Rachel’s father, was suddenly elevated at the age of sixteen to the rank of fourth earl of Southampton.

Rachel’s father, born in 1608 at Little Shelford in Cambridgeshire, inherited neither his father’s good looks, impetuous nature, nor martial ardor. As a second son, Thomas Wriothesley had not expected to inherit his father’s title and estates. And although he had had some experience in court ceremonials (at the age of eight he served as cupbearer at the investiture of Charles as Prince of Wales), he was discomfited by the new deference shown him as a peer of the realm. But he was an in-
telligent young man. In 1625, when he was only seventeen years old, he discharged the social duties of his new status by entertaining King Charles I and his French bride, Henrietta Maria, at Titchfield. The queen enjoyed herself enough to stay on for five weeks and three days. In the autumn of 1625 Thomas entered St. John’s College, Cambridge, a center for Puritan thought, which would have reinforced his father’s Puritan inclinations and his own sober nature. He impressed the president and seniors with his “fair and noble...demeanour,” surely fulfilling his mother’s hope that he would imitate his father in love of learning. In 1626, he left St. John’s College without taking a degree. His only youthful failing was enthusiasm for gambling and horse racing.

Rachel’s mother, Rachel Massüe de Ruvigny de la Maison Fort, was the eldest daughter of Daniel de Massüe, seigneur de Ruvigny and seigneur de Rainval, and of Magdelaine de Pinot, the widow of Jean Pinot, seigneur de Fontaine. Descended from a bourgeois family of Abbeville, her immediate ancestors had achieved a place in French society and government, but not one of the first rank. Her grandfather was Antoine d’Ailly, seigneur de la Mairie and de Pierrepont, and in the early seventeenth century her father held the post of lieutenant-governor of the Bastille, serving under the governor of the Bastille, Maximilien de Béthune, the duc de Sully, a chief adviser to King Henry IV. A friendly relationship existed between the two families. The de Sullys were godparents to Rachel Massüe de Ruvigny and her brothers, including Henri, born probably in 1605, who became the first marquis de Ruvigny. After Rachel Massüe de Ruvigny’s mother died, her father married sometime between 1608 and 1611 Madelaine de Fontaine, dame de Caillemotte. When her father died in 1611, Rachel Massüe de Ruvigny and her brothers were left in the charge of their stepmother. The death of one brother left only Henri and Rachel, and they developed a closer sibling relationship than they might otherwise have done. When Rachel Massüe de Ruvigny de la Maison Fort married Southampton, Henri and her stepmother (who lived until 1636) accompanied her on her wedding trip to England. Her brother kept in touch with her, visiting at least once, three months before our Rachel was born, and remained a presence in the Southampton family.

At the time Rachel Massüe de Ruvigny de la Maison Fort met Southampton in Paris in 1634, her brother’s growing importance had elevated her position. A protégé of the duc de Sully, de Ruvigny became an officer in the French Guards and first made a name for himself at the siege of La Rochelle in 1627, when he fought against the Huguenot insurgents, his fellow religionists. Thanks to his personal bravery, the city fell to King Louis XIII, who, accompanied by Richelieu, entered it in triumph. De Ruvigny continued to fight on the side of the king
against his fellow Huguenots, justifying his actions on the grounds that
the latter should loyally serve France, but he nonetheless gained a reputa-
tion among the Huguenots for Protestant piety and conviction.29 His
high reputation in both Huguenot and court circles prepared the way for
his later advancement. To anticipate, in 1653 Louis XIV appointed
de Ruvigny to the post of lord deputy-general of Protestants in France—
that is, to the position of chief spokesman for the interests and grievances
of French Protestants at the royal court. After the Restoration of the
Stuarts in 1660, Henri served as a special envoy and then in 1673 as
ambassador from Louis XIV to the court of King Charles II. Thus,
de Ruvigny came often to England, and a loving familial relationship
developed between him and his son (also Henri) and Rachel and her
family. Our Rachel dearly loved her “old uncle” and stayed in close
touch with him as long as he lived. His son, the second marquis de
Ruvigny, who fought with the prince of Orange in the Revolution of
1688–89 and became the first earl of Galway, continued this intimate
connection until his death in 1720.

What were the circumstances that brought Rachel’s parents to-
gether? For all his love of solitude and his dour disposition, Southamp-
ton was fond of horse racing and gambling, and that fondness was at the
root of his meeting Madame de la Maison Fort. In March 1634 he lost
money at the races at Newmarket. Full of remorse, he vowed to give up
horses and gambling and, securing the usual three-year license to travel
on the Continent, left for Paris to begin a kind of self-imposed pen-
ance.30 He had, of course, entrée to French society. He had visited
France earlier, and his father had been well known in French circles. In
fact, his father had played host to the Huguenot leader, the duc de Sully,
when he had come to England years before, in 1603.31 But the duc de
Sully, Madame de la Maison Fort’s godfather, was not the one who
brought the couple together. Rather, an English friend of Southampton’s,
Sir William St. Claire, introduced them to each other at a dinner party
in Paris.32

From the moment of the dinner party, romantic love seems to
have enveloped Madame de la Maison Fort and the earl of Southampton,
and a whirlwind courtship ensued. Each was in a position to make an
independent choice of spouse. As a widow, Madame de la Maison Fort
could act freely; her closest relations were her stepmother and her
brother. Objections from them to the union would have been unlikely,
for marrying an English earl represented a great social advance for her.
Southampton was also free to indulge his heart. Since his father was
dead, there was no head of the family to whom he was obliged to defer
and who might have pointed out certain disadvantages to his marrying
this Frenchwoman. In July Southampton’s traveling companion and
Lady Rachel Russell
cousin, Henry Vernon, was back in England on “extraordinary business,” which probably was to assist the earl to put his financial affairs in order so that he could marry. Perhaps Vernon looked into the private sales of timber from the New Forest, a part of Southampton’s Hampshire estate. With the permission of King Charles I, such sales had been going on since May to help Southampton reduce his debts. Vernon returned to France at the end of July, and within three weeks Southampton and Madame de la Maison Fort were married. Southampton was back at Titchfield with his bride by August 24, 1634, ready to take on the pleasures and responsibilities of a family man.33

Rachel de la Maison Fort brought to the marriage highly desirable personal qualities: beauty, virtue, religious devotion, sweetness of disposition, and also high spirits. Rather incongruously, given her undoubted piety, Madame de la Maison Fort, as a young widow, took part in the worldly life of Paris and the court and enjoyed the attention of suitors. Tallemant des Réaux, the contemporary gossip who delighted in reporting lewd anecdotes, wrote incredulously that despite nine years of widowhood and many importunate suitors her reputation as a chaste woman remained intact. One suitor, Saint Prueill de Jussac en Angoumois, wooed her with great extravagance, arranging public games in her honor and one time bringing in twenty-four violin players to serenade her on the street.34 Madame de la Maison Fort did not dissuade him from this nonsense, and he continued to present her with so many publicly displayed marks of his ardor that they became known as the “Saint Prueillades.”

Madame de la Maison Fort must have astonished and bemused her suitors; it was said that she would interrupt a conversation with an admirer, retire for brief prayer and religious meditation, and then return to her suitor for further talk. For a woman to preserve her reputation in the licentious society of the court of Louis XIII and remain at the same time a part of that society took intelligence, common sense, religious conviction, and a love of that society. So successful was she in walking this fine line that Corneille dedicated to her his play La Veuve, printed in March 1634, the very month that Southampton arrived in Paris. Corneille used her as the model of a beautiful and virtuous widow, and described her in the dedicatory poem as a “charming original,” a woman possessed of a “beautiful spirit in a beautiful body.”35 This rather unusual combination of personal characteristics—fun-loving worldliness, personal virtue, and seriousness of religious conviction—must have held special appeal to the rather sober-sided Southampton. The countess of Southampton’s untimely death in 1640 meant that she had only a very limited influence on her children, but, nonetheless, some of these same traits may be discerned in her daughter Rachel.
Madame de la Maison Fort’s beauty was much remarked in both France and England. In France she was known as “la belle et vertueuse Huguenotte.” The famous portrait artist Van Dyck painted her portrait (reproduced in the illustrations), perhaps in 1636, a year before our Rachel was born, and in keeping with the contemporary fashion in portraiture, employed an allegorical motif, said to have been designed to underscore her beauty. Beauty, in the person of the countess of Southampton, reigns over the Universe from a seat in the clouds and triumphs over Death, symbolized by a skull on which she rests her foot. Van Dyck painted a strikingly handsome woman with lovely dark hair done in a chignon encircled with pearls, black eyes, and regular features, looking at the viewer confidently, even provocatively. He shows a well-proportioned figure, round, bare arms, and slender hands, highlighting the whole with a blue satin scarf draped decolletage over a white chemise. Several copies and versions of the portrait were made, but the original came into the possession of our Rachel, who may also have commissioned a version of it. She gave her second daughter, Katherine, an admittedly inferior copy of a portrait of her mother. The portraits are the only evidence of our Rachel’s interest in perpetuating the memory of her mother. One has only to compare the portraits of the countess and Rachel to see that Rachel inherited her beauty from her mother.

There were several reasons, beyond the custom of the time, for a member of the English aristocracy not to choose a foreign bride, why a more calculating and politically ambitious man than Southampton would have stifled the urge to marry Rachel de la Maison Fort. Those reasons make the romantic attachment all the more compelling. First, as we have already seen, Rachel’s family did not equal Southampton’s in status or wealth. Second, for an English lord to marry a Frenchwoman so closely linked with the Huguenots was a rash step. For several years the influence of William Laud over King Charles I and in church affairs had grown. In 1633 Laud had won the post of archbishop of Canterbury. Already there was evidence of his determination to purify the Church of England of Puritan influences. Moreover, in 1625 King Charles I had married the French princess Henrietta Maria, and by 1634, in the wake of the assassination of the duke of Buckingham, she had achieved some influence over her husband and in court affairs. Devoutly Catholic, Henrietta Maria looked with entire disfavor on the Huguenots in her native land and distrusted the Puritans, their counterparts in England. In such circumstances, Southampton could not expect that his bride would enhance his opportunities for advancement at court, where the financial rewards that usually came with royal favor were great.

Third, Madame de la Maison Fort did not bring a large dowry. In view of Southampton’s financial condition, he might have been ex-
pected to have searched for a wealthy heiress as a wife. The earl was certainly not poor, but he had faced severe financial problems in the 1620s. He was a minor at the death of his father in 1624 and so became a ward of the court. It cost his mother close to £3,000 to purchase his wardship and marriage, and she had to pay further sums to the duke of Buckingham, the king’s favorite, who won the profits of the wardship and the management of the boy’s education. Thomas’s father’s lucrative pensions were not transferred to him, despite the efforts of powerful persons. Moreover, Southampton had been obliged to pay off his father’s debts and provide for his mother. The situation was serious enough for him to sell some properties in 1629, when he reached his majority and sued for his livery. In 1633 he was thinking of making further sales. This is one reason why he felt so remorseful about losing money at the horse races and vowed to give up gambling.

The marriage contract that united Southampton and Madame de la Maison Fort has disappeared, so the exact terms are unknown. But rumors spread from Paris that Rachel did not possess a great fortune. Initially, gossip placed her estate at 300,000 crowns, but later downgraded it to no more than 10,000 crowns. Rumors apart, it is a fact that her first marriage in 1624 to Elysée de Beaujeu, sieur de la Maison Fort en Nivernais, was not a brilliant match. Beaujeu, a Huguenot, held a military post, probably under the due de Sully. He died, perhaps a suicide, sometime before November 1625. A baby girl, Madeleine, was born posthumously and also died. In December 1626 Elysée’s sister, Eleonard de Beaujeu, and her husband, Gédéon de Bois-des-Courts (also associated with the due de Sully), sued Rachel in the Requetes du Palais de Paris for 6,000 livres which had been made over to her for the benefit of her daughter. The disposition of the case is unknown, but the suit holds interest for the slight clue it may provide about Madame de la Maison Fort’s economic status. Six thousand livres to support a child is a respectable sum but does not suggest a great fortune.

Rumors about the dowry Southampton’s French bride had brought him circulated in England too. There it was said that Southampton had got “little” from Madame de la Maison Fort. Further, the story went around that the earl “could have made a match in England that would have benefited his estate.” It was said that Sir Thomas Thynne, thought to be the richest commoner in England, had tried to persuade Southampton to marry his daughter, who was learned in Greek and Latin, and whose marriage portion was £40,000. Thynne was so eager to link his children to the noble Southampton family that he also offered to settle £7,000 a year in land on his son and heir and marry him to the earl’s sister, Elizabeth Wriothesley, without asking any portion at all from her. Southampton turned down the proposal. Plainly, he gave up a
great deal in material terms when he married Rachel de Ruvigny de la Maison Fort.

Southampton brought his bride back to Titchfield and settled down to establish himself and raise a family. Although he must have realized that his marriage to a French Huguenot woman would not advance his interests, Southampton arranged to present his wife at court in the fall. The new countess, who was already pregnant, dazzled the assembly with her beauty. The next year, in July, the earl made a gesture towards ingratiating himself with the king: he named his firstborn son Charles and laid on a christening party “with the most sumptuous pomp.” The affair was attended by the French and Venetian ambassadors, and the king himself made a special trip to London to be present. The birth of the boy was greeted with such joy that his death in November 1635 must have been a grievous blow; it also meant that a personal link with the king was broken. Other children came in rapid succession: Elizabeth in 1636, named after the earl’s grandmother; our Rachel in September 1637, named after her mother; Henry in October 1638, named after the earl’s father. For none of their baptisms was the king present.

During the years of Rachel’s babyhood until 1640 her mother and father lived a retired life at Titchfield, her father devoting himself to repairing his fortune. He came into conflict with the government in so doing, with the result that he developed personal and economic grievances against the king. For example, the revival of the old Forest Laws, one of the quasi-legal steps the king took to raise money during the 1630s when he declined to call a parliament, fell with particular severity on Southampton’s Hampshire estate. In October 1635 a Forest Court held at Winchester claimed for the king 2,236 acres of his land. It was said, with some exaggeration, that this action would “utterly ruin” Southampton. Charles later reduced the claim, but some of the earl’s land remained under royal control, and in 1638–39 Southampton was still not free to cut timber on his estates without royal permission.

Southampton encountered another difficulty with the court during a visit the king paid to Titchfield in September 1636. The king’s officers threatened the earl’s servants and tenants because the latter claimed exemption from the charges of carriage. Southampton, citing a grant of privileges by King James I to his father, petitioned for a review and confirmation of the grant. The results of the review are unknown, but it was still another irritating incident in Southampton’s relationship with the royal government.

The earl also faced disappointment in other business dealings. In March 1636, Southampton petitioned the king for permission to destroy houses on his Holborn property in London and erect tenements.
Although the king brought the petition to the council with his endorsement, saying that he “much respected Southampton,” the council denied it. As had happened with the claim against his forest land, the council reversed itself and granted his petition, but not until two years later.\(^{47}\) Finally, in 1639 the earl was rebuffed by the crown in his efforts to outfit a ship for colonizing the island of Mauritius. He had persuaded a group of investors to support his scheme and had found a ship for the purpose. But the East India Company objected on grounds of its monopoly, and the crown agreed, so the scheme came to nothing.\(^{48}\)

On the other hand, Southampton did receive some marks of royal favor. In April 1636 the king made him a councillor for New England and in March 1638 granted him the island of Mauritius, which he renamed Charles Island.\(^{49}\) In September 1636 and again for six weeks in the summer of 1637, just before Rachel was born, the king paid him the honor of visiting him to hunt in New Forest.\(^{50}\) Also in 1637, Charles granted denization (that is to say, English citizenship) to his French wife. Denization was in Southampton’s interest: it changed the countess’s status at law, giving her the right to inherit land, claim guardianship over a ward holding land in tenure, and enjoy the privileges of the earl’s title in a court of law.\(^{51}\) And in 1640 the earl won permission to build a new town house on his Bloomsbury property to replace the house torn down in Holborn.\(^{52}\)

But these favors were slim marks of royal regard, hardly enough to offset the disappointment and annoyance the earl had suffered in his business affairs. Moreover, Southampton had general reasons for disliking Charles’s government. His Puritan inclinations and the influence of his devoutly Huguenot wife would have disposed him against the innovations in the Anglican church that Archbishop Laud was introducing. He objected not only to the notions of royal sovereignty held by Charles I and his friends but also to the rigorous administration in Ireland of the earl of Strafford. Thus, despite some overtures on both sides, Southampton did not become an intimate of Charles I during the 1630s when objections to the government were deepening. Indeed, the king’s critics thought that he was hostile to the government and tried to win him to their side in the late 1630s.\(^{53}\)

The year 1640, when national politics were entering a crisis stage, must have been a very unhappy one for little Rachel. When she was two and a half years old, on February 16, 1640, her mother died giving birth to a daughter, Magdalene, who survived. The loss of her mother occurred at a time in her life when, psychologists today tell us, it is especially difficult for a child to deal with such a blow. Then, three months after her mother’s death, her father left his family to go up to London for the meetings of the Short Parliament. That parliament,
called by King Charles I in hopes of getting money to finance the war he was fighting against Scotland, lasted until May 4, with the earl in attendance at every session and voting not to give precedence to the king’s request for supplies until grievances were discussed. The Short Parliament marked Southampton’s emergence from private life at Titchfield and the beginning of his ascent to national prominence. He became a leader of the House of Lords in the Long Parliament, from the fall of 1640 to 1642, and then a principal adviser to the king until Charles I’s execution in 1649. In his frequent and prolonged absences, his four children were placed under the general care first of their grandmother, Elizabeth, dowager countess of Southampton, and later, when the earl married a second time in 1642, of their stepmother, Elizabeth Leigh (daughter of Francis Leigh, Lord Dunsmore, who became the earl of Chichester). These circumstances may have promoted the deep attachment that Rachel formed for her elder sister Elizabeth and the need for the approval of others that she later admitted.

Southampton’s political role during these years meant little to Rachel at the time. In the Long Parliament he developed a reputation as a man devoted to the public interest and won appointment to major committees. In April 1641 Southampton broke with the king’s critics over their use of a bill of attainder to remove the earl of Strafford, and in January 1642, when the crisis had sharply escalated, he accepted the post of gentleman of the bedchamber and the office of privy councillor to the king. He chose Charles’s side, according to his friend, Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon, out of a sense of duty, a commitment to monarchy, and the conviction that the nobility would fall if the kingship did.

From the spring of 1642 on, Southampton, although mindful of the king’s weaknesses, loyally served Charles I. It was he, so it was said, who brought Charles a copy of the *Eikon Basilike* to comfort him. Present at the trial of the king, Southampton was one of four lords who on January 26, 1649, offered to pledge their estates and lives on any terms if the army leaders would spare the king’s life, restore his freedom, and preserve his title. After the court condemned Charles to death, Southampton tried without success to visit him. But he allegedly was successful in obtaining permission to watch by Charles’s bier in the Banqueting Hall. He and three other peers accompanied the king’s body to Windsor to be buried. Stories of all these great events and Southampton’s part in them must have been told after the earl’s return to Titchfield in 1649, when Rachel was a young girl of twelve years. Years later, when she pleaded with King Charles II to spare the life of her husband, William Russell, she reminded him of how devoted her father had been in serving his father. She meant to call to the king’s mind the memory of such events as these.
The Civil Wars touched young Rachel’s life in several ways. Some events occurred so close to home that they fell within her ken and would have vivified for her the political affairs of the larger world. Soldiers on both sides were present in Hampshire. In 1643 the earl of Essex’s army was garrisoned in the town of Titchfield, located about a mile from Titchfield Abbey, where Rachel lived. Battles took place not far from the abbey, at Portsmouth and West Meon. The estate suffered damage, for iron and wood were seized and soldiers were billeted there. She may have seen and surely would have heard stories of such activities.

Still further, in November 1647, when Rachel was ten years old, King Charles I stopped at Titchfield. He had escaped from Hampton Court, intending perhaps to flee to France, but because of some mishap there was no ship waiting for him, and he made his way instead to Southampton’s house. Finding there Elizabeth the dowager countess “with a small family,” he stayed for two days before going on to Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. Rachel does not mention this episode, but a visit by the king of England must have created a moment of excitement and heightened her awareness of the outside world.

Furthermore, the war and the taxes imposed on royalists by the revolutionary government represented an economic setback to Rachel’s family. Her father had to pay a fine of £6,466 to the government and £250 a year to the clergy in churches in which he served as a lay rector. The situation was serious enough for the earl to redraw leases to force his tenants to share the costs of the war, interest himself in agricultural practices to get more yield from his lands, and take out a mortgage on some of his Hampshire properties.

The end of the war brought Southampton back to his family. Rachel, who specifically mentioned living with him at Titchfield, Stratton, and other manor houses from about 1651 to 1654, must have been aware of his continuing services to the Stuarts. After the battle of Worcester in 1651 the earl offered Charles II a haven at Titchfield and a boat to escape to France. In the event, Charles left by another boat, but he was mindful that Southampton was the only person of his quality to risk danger by offering him aid. In subsequent years Southampton deliberately avoided opportunities to become reconciled with Cromwell. Although not a member of the Sealed Knot, the small key group of royalists in England, the earl regularly sent money to the exiled king and kept in touch with Edward Hyde, who in the 1650s tried to orchestrate the political activities of the royalists at home and abroad. These were still further points in the story of Southampton’s relationship with the Stuarts that Rachel would have wished to call to mind when she pleaded with Charles II to spare the life of her husband.

Another effect of the Civil Wars on Rachel may have been the
nature of her education. Mary Berry, her first biographer, conjectured that Rachel’s formal education lacked rigor and thought this accountable to the dislocations of the 1640s. The point is moot, because the bulk of Southampton’s private and household papers have failed to survive, and there is no direct evidence about Rachel’s formal education, as there is, for example, about that of her second husband, William Russell, and his brothers and sisters. Nor does Rachel herself, in the two autobiographical fragments she wrote late in life, tell us anything about what she read as a child or the pattern of her day, as does, for example, Anne Lady Halkett, and other women who were her near contemporaries. But a good deal may be deduced from indirect evidence and from what we know of Rachel as an adult.

It is reasonable to assume that a tutor, or more likely tutors, were in residence at Titchfield to instruct Rachel and her sisters. The Italian humanist tradition in which Rachel’s father was reared would have demanded as much. Prescriptive literature about educating gentlewomen which appeared in quantity in early-seventeenth-century England reinforced such a requirement. The presence over several generations of educated women in the Southampton family is equally pertinent. The first countess of Southampton, Jane Cheney, the daughter of William Cheney of Chesham Bois in Buckinghamshire, could read and write and possessed a 1532 edition of the works of Chaucer. She was the first owner of this important book, and, reflecting her pride in ownership, she inscribed the book in four places with “this ys Jane Southampton boke.” In her will she left her daughters books of gold, set with diamonds and rubies, marked with the queen’s writing. The letters of Mary Browne, the second countess, reveal a highly literate woman with style and intelligence. And the third countess of Southampton, Rachel’s grandmother, was also a literate woman, who, as we have seen, donated the third earl’s library to St. John’s College and took an interest in her son’s education.

Moreover, the earl of Southampton, although preoccupied with public responsibilities during the Civil Wars, would have provided his daughters with instruction suitable to their class and conformable with the Puritan tradition of Bible and devotional reading. A man reared in the humanist tradition, exposed to his father’s great library, and married to a devout Huguenot woman could not have done otherwise. In a letter to Southampton, Henry Tubbe, a graduate of Cambridge and a visitor to Titchfield in 1648, painted a portrait of the high-minded atmosphere there, which he credited to Southampton. The “discipline and devotion” of the household were so “like ours at Cambridge” that he felt that he was at a college, while there was so much “gravity and state, but no pride at all” about the company that he sometimes imagined himself at
He asked particularly to be remembered to the “young ladies”—that is, Rachel and her sisters. All this circumstantial evidence carries the strong presumption that a careful program of education was provided the girls in the family.

The curriculum Rachel and her sisters followed was probably one commonly offered to young gentlewomen. They would have been taught to read and write and to do sums. Rachel mastered a clear, legible handwriting (as did her sisters), learned to spell as well as any of her correspondents, and developed a marked talent for forthright, engaging expression. It was customary for a gentlewoman to learn needlework, and Rachel probably did, but in later life it was a pen, not a needle, that was constantly in her hand. She also probably received instruction in music—singing, dancing, perhaps playing an instrument. But Rachel did not mention music nor turn to it for comfort during the sorrows of her later life.

Latin and Greek were not normally a part of the curriculum for girls, and there is no evidence either that Rachel was taught them or that she undertook to learn them on her own, as did some contemporary women. Rachel may have studied poetry and serious literature, but she did not, apparently, develop an abiding interest in either one: in all her many letters she mentions but one poet, William Waller. Like so many of her contemporaries, as an adult she enjoyed the London theater. History may have been included in her studies, as her later interest in reading and taking notes on Roman history would suggest.

French would have been an important part of Rachel’s education. It is probable that she had a French tutor, as did earlier generations of Southampton children; it is certain that she developed genuine skill in reading and writing French. Circumstances would have encouraged her interest in doing so. Her French mother, it may be reasonably supposed, sometimes spoke French to her when she was a baby. After her mother’s death, the ties with her French uncle, Henri de Ruvigny, strengthened. In August 1641 Rachel and her two sisters, Elizabeth and Magdalene, became naturalized French citizens with a dispensation of the requirement of living in France. De Ruvigny, whose finances had greatly improved at about this time by reason of a royal pension and inheritance of some French property, took this step so that the girls could inherit his property, should he die without legitimate issue. Rachel’s brother, Henry, the heir to the Southampton title, was not included in these arrangements. The fact that Rachel held dual citizenship was without apparent importance until many years later, when she exploited that status to strengthen her claim to some de Ruvigny property in France.

Interest in the French language would also have been promoted by visits of the Southampton children to France during the 1640s. In 1643
Rachel’s brother, Henry, was sent to France, perhaps to remove him from danger as the Civil War deepened. He died in Paris and was buried at the church at Charenton, where his mother had been baptized and his parents married.80 Sometime between 1648 and 1651, Rachel herself visited France for an unknown number of months.81 She almost certainly stayed with her uncle and his new wife, Marie Tallemant, whom he had married in 1647, at their home in the Faubourg St. Germain in Paris. Marie Tallemant, who came from a wealthy family of Protestant bankers, was the sister of Tallemant des Réaux, the famous gossip who wrote about Rachel de la Maison Fort. Marie Tallemant’s relatives were to touch our Rachel’s life later on.82 What Rachel did and saw and her reactions to the visit are unknown. Her only surviving reference to the trip came sixty years later when she recalled that she had learned a card game, hoc marevin, in France.83 But during this visit she would have met her cousin Henri, who was born on April 9, 1648. It was this child, nine years her junior, who would become the first earl of Galway and Rachel’s closest friend in old age. Rachel’s visit to France was not comparable to a “Grand Tour,” which had become an integral part of the education of aristocratic boys,84 but it would have introduced Rachel to her mother’s family, church, and religion; confirmed ties with her uncle; broadened her mental horizons; and strengthened her command of the French language.

The principal substance of her education would have been religious works. She would have read the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer and studied catechisms, similar perhaps to the one prepared for her daughter, which she preserved.85 Since Puritanism was an important part of her father’s religion and had been reinforced by her Huguenot mother, perhaps Richard Baxter’s Sincere Convert was among her books, as it was among William Russell’s.86 Whatever her reading, Rachel became well grounded in the Bible and religious teachings. Yet, according to her disarming confessions made later, religion was not the center of her life when she was young. She admitted that as a girl she was sometimes inattentive at private prayer and disinterested in attending public services. She confessed that she felt she had done well if she read a few lines in a pious book, and that even after a “sharp illness” when she was fifteen she continued to spend her time, as she put it, idly.87 Rachel also lamented that she read carelessly, out of curiosity, and described herself as “not industrious to get knowledge” to glorify God.88 Nonetheless, the groundwork for her later piety was laid in her youth.

If Rachel’s formal education did indeed lack rigor, a reason equally as important as the dislocations of the Civil Wars was the absence of boys in the family. Had there been boys, their tutors almost certainly
would have instructed the girls as well, perhaps in much the same cur-
riculum, as was the case in the Russell family. But Rachel’s two
brothers, as we have seen, had died young—Charles at six months in
November 1635 and Henry at five years in December 1643. So Rachel
grew up in a decidedly female environment, composed of her sister
Elizabeth, just fourteen months her senior; her younger sister Magdalene,
who died in 1643; her grandmother, in her seventies in the 1640s and
still living at Titchfield in 1651; and her stepmother, Elizabeth Leigh,
whom her father married in 1642. The new countess, her father’s second
wife, lived to 1654 and thus was the longest-term maternal presence in
Rachel’s life. Elizabeth was described as a “beautiful and worthy
lady,” but her influence on Rachel was not always praiseworthy. Late
in life Rachel confessed that as a young girl she had been “ready to give
ear to reports, and possibly malicious ones,” and relay them to her step-
mother “to please her,” and admitted that throughout her life she
indulged in gossip.
Rachel’s remark repays reflection. It surely reveals
a young girl growing into womanhood, confronting the often awkward
relationship between stepdaughter and stepmother, and trying to ingrati-
ate herself with her stepmother. The desire to please, to “seek the esteem
of others,” to be unwilling “to displease” people, as Rachel put it later,
was one side of her personality.

Elizabeth Leigh bore the earl of Southampton four daughters.
Only one child, also named Elizabeth, born in 1646, lived to adulthood.
Rachel’s three other half-sisters were part of the family for varying
lengths of time: Audrey, born in 1643 or 1644, lived until 1660; Penelope,
born sometime after 1647, died in April 1649; and a second Penelope,
whose birth date is also unknown, died in 1655. Thus, the only male
presence in the family was her father, who was absent during the Civil
War a good part of the time.

While such a female-dominated household may not have offered
a favorable context for pursuing a rigorous educational program, Rachel
may have developed a more independent, self-confident attitude than she
otherwise would have done had she grown up with brothers whose very
presence would have demonstrated that males always took precedence
over females. The absence of brothers also provided circumstances in
which abiding affection, or disaffection, might grow among the sisters.
As it happened, the girls grew to love each other. Rachel was especially
close to her sister Elizabeth, with whom she lived at Titchfield after the
death of Rachel’s first husband. She described her as a “delicious
friend,” whom she loved with too much passion, and whose “conversa-
tions and tender kindness” were precious to her.

Rachel was also fond of the younger Elizabeth, her half-sister, who lived nearby in London
and with whom she exchanged regular visits. At her death Rachel wrote
that she had "ever loved her tenderly." This sisterly affection not only enriched the personal lives of these three women, but also enlarged their political connections and made possible the extraordinarily harmonious division among them of their father's estate when he died in 1667.

The death of close family members and personal illness were features of Rachel's childhood. As we have seen, her mother died when she was two and a half years old, and when she was six, her younger brother, Henry, and her younger sister, Magdalene, both died within the year. Her half-sister Penelope died when Rachel was twelve years old. Rachel herself barely escaped death from pleurisy in 1652, when she was fifteen. As a young woman she was subject to "rheums," which tended to settle in her lungs. It is impossible to gauge the impact of these experiences upon a child's mind and emotions, but it seems undeniable that they were of some importance in forming her views of God and of personal relationships.

Class and ancestry were critically important determinants in Rachel Russell's development as a woman. Her class was noble and privileged; her family was Anglo-French, which was almost unique in noble English circles. Her mother endowed her with beauty, high spirits, and Continental connections. Rachel's education, although not outstanding, probably fulfilled the important features of the humanist ideal and, in any case, rendered her perfectly literate. A visit to France would have broadened her intellectual horizons, strengthened her command of the French language, and reinforced ties with her mother's family. The great public events of the 1640s in which her father played such a prominent part touched her young life only indirectly, but surely induced in her a consciousness of public authority. Her father's religiosity found reflection in household piety, which laid the foundations for Rachel's own commitment to an Anglicanism that was deeply marked by respect for Puritanism. The death of her mother and of other family members, the remarriage of her father, and her own illnesses and those of others surely reinforced her consciousness of God's presence in man's affairs. Very early in her life, personal relationships were important to Rachel; she learned to love, to please, and to be loved. These features of her background and childhood help to explain her character in adulthood, her assumptions about religion and politics, and her independent spirit.