

The Changing Life of the People



I. Marriage and the Family

A. Extended and Nuclear Families

1. The nuclear family was the most common in preindustrial Europe, unlike in traditional Africa and Asia.
2. Common people married late (mostly in their late twenties) in this period.

B. Work Away from Home

1. Girls and boys both learned independence by working away from home as servants, apprentices, and laborers.
2. Service in another family's home was the most common job for single girls.
3. Servant girls worked hard, had little independence, and were in constant danger of sexual exploitation.

C. Premarital Sex and Community Controls

1. The evidence suggests a low rate of illegitimate births.
2. In rural villages there were tight community controls over premarital sex and adultery.
3. Once married, couples generally had several children.

D. New Patterns of Marriage and Illegitimacy

1. Cottage industry enabled young men and women to become independent earlier.
2. Young villagers who moved to the city entered into new sexual relationships free of community control.
3. Rates of illegitimacy rose sharply between 1750 and 1850.

II. Children and Education

A. Child Care and Nursing

1. Women of the lower classes generally breast-fed their children for a longer period of time than is customary today.
2. The well-off generally hired poor wet nurses to breast-feed their children.

- B. Foundlings and Infanticide
 - 1. Rates of infant mortality were high.
 - 2. Many children were abandoned soon after birth and foundling homes existed to care for some of these children.
 - 3. There is some evidence that infanticide remained common.
- C. Attitudes Toward Children
 - 1. Parents and other adults tended to be emotionally detached from children.
 - 2. The medical establishment was seldom interested in the care of children.
 - 3. Emotional detachment often shaded into abuse.
 - 4. From the middle of the eighteenth century, this pattern came under increasing attack.
- D. Schools and Popular Literature
 - 1. Protestants and Catholics encouraged common people to read the Bible.
 - 2. Some European governments encouraged primary school education for children of the common people (Prussia, other Protestant principalities in Germany, Scotland, England, the Austrian Empire).
 - 3. Basic literacy rose rapidly between 1600 and 1800.
- III. Food and Medical Practice
 - A. Diets and Nutrition
 - 1. The poor ate whole grain bread, beans, peas, vegetables—a healthy diet except for shortage of vitamins A and C in late winter.
 - 2. The rich gorged on meat, sweets, and liquor and suffered from gout and shortages of vitamins A and C.
 - B. The Impact of Diet on Health
 - 1. The diet of the poor in normal times was adequate, but seasonal shortages and famines undermined health.
 - 2. The diet of the rich caused other health problems.
 - 3. As the century progressed, food consumption became more varied.
 - 4. New foods introduced from the Americas (corn, squash, tomatoes, potatoes) improved calorie per acre production and nutrition.
 - C. Medical Practitioners
 - 1. Medical practitioners in the 1700s included faith healers, pharmacists, physicians, surgeons, and midwives.
 - 2. Over time women were increasingly excluded from medical practice outside midwifery.
 - 3. Few treatments by any of these practitioners were effective.
 - D. Hospitals and Medical Experiments
 - 1. In France, Diderot's critique of hospital conditions led to some improvements in cleanliness and ventilation.
 - 2. In mental hospitals patients were restrained with chains and kept under control with bleeding and cold water.
 - 3. Experimentation with inoculation against smallpox led eventually to vaccination with cowpox, which was effective in preventing the disease (Edward Jenner, 1798).
- IV. Religion and Popular Culture
 - A. The Institutional Church

1. Protestants quickly created bureaucratized churches controlled by the secular powers.
 2. Catholic rulers increasingly took control of the Catholic Church in their domains (as in Spain).
- B. Protestant Revival
1. Pietism sought to revive the emotional fervor of early Protestantism.
 2. Influenced by Pietism, John Wesley (1703-1791) propagandized Methodism among the English populace.
- C. Catholic Piety
1. Catholic authorities tended to compromise with the pagan elements and festivity of popular Catholicism.
 2. Inspired by the Counter-Reformation, Catholic clergy sought increasingly to “purify” popular religious practices.
 3. Such efforts created tension between the attitudes of educated elites and the common people.
- D. Leisure and Recreation
1. Carnival illustrates the combination of religious celebration and popular recreation.
 2. Towns and cities offered a wide range of amusements.
 3. Blood sports were popular with the masses.
 4. Within Europe there was a growing division between “high culture” and popular culture, with elite reformers tending to see the latter as sin, superstition, disorder, and vulgarity.