



The Family in the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age

Beatrice Gottlieb

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During the last few decades the study of the family has flourished, and in the process many myths about what life was like two or three centuries ago have been debunked. For example, contrary to popular belief, we now know that most women in the preindustrial West did not marry before they were twenty-five. Most households consisted of no more than four or five people, usually including unrelated young people working as servants. And perhaps most surprising of all, multigenerational households were not very common. Pulling together much fascinating information about the family in the preindustrial Western world, Beatrice Gottlieb presents every aspect of this rich subject with clarity and fairness. Her generously illustrated book deals with the households of the wealthy and the poor, courtship and marriage, the care and training of children, and the bonds (and strains) of kinship. The matter of inheritance receives special attention, as it played a substantial role in a world permeated by rank and status, and its importance gave the family a peculiar social and economic significance. With a focus on the ordinary people whose everyday lives strike a responsive chord in all of us, as well as brief appearances by famous people and important events in history--Henry VIII's divorce, Benjamin Franklin's apprenticeship to his brother, and Mary Wollstonecraft's death in childbirth--this remarkable, eminently readable work brings to vivid life the wives and husbands, servants and masters, children and parents of a not too distant past.

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