

## Not “Simply Mrs. Warren”: Eliza Warren Francis (c.1810-1900) and the *Ladies’ Treasury*

In the 1860s through 1890s, “Mrs Warren” was a familiar name in household management. Her manuals *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* (1864), *How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage* (1865) and *Comfort For Small Incomes* (1866) all went through several editions, selling thousands of copies in Britain and across the Atlantic. Warren also acquired considerable reputation as the editor of the *Ladies’ Treasury* (1857-95), one of the most successful Victorian periodical for middle-class women.<sup>1</sup> Yet, while the lives of her primary competitors Samuel and Isabella Beeton of the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* (1852-79) and *Beeton’s Book of Household Management* (1859) have been amply documented in several biographies, *DNB* entries and even a BBC television drama, Mrs Warren is only known through her publications and rivalry with the Beetons. In her recent *Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, Kathryn Hughes calls the *Ladies’ Treasury* “a plodding copycat” of the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, suggesting that “one book that Mrs. Warren never wrote, but perhaps should have, was ‘How I Turned to Authorship in Order to Pay Someone Else to Do My Domestic Work for Me’.”<sup>2</sup>

With this essay, we hope to contribute to a more nuanced portrait of Mrs Warren, who was born Eliza Jervis around 1810 and died Eliza Warren Francis in 1900. Using the chronology of her life, reconstructed from parish records, census data, personal letters and other archival documents, as a framework, we trace the development of her career as an author, periodical editor and contributor, paying particular attention to her performance of a variety of gendered authorial and editorial identities in her most successful publication, the *Ladies’ Treasury*. Our aim is to demonstrate that, rather than being a mere counterfeit of

Isabella Beeton, Warren Francis was a remarkably prolific and enterprising figure in the nineteenth-century publishing world, market-oriented, ambitious, unafraid of commercial experiment, while at the same time shaped by the particular circumstances of her personal life, notably childlessness and early widowhood.

Born into a typical lower-middle-class family of traders, Eliza Jervis was christened on 19 June 1811 at St Cuthbert, Wells, the first of six surviving children of cloth dealer John Jervis and his wife Jane, *née* Honiball.<sup>3</sup> At the age of 25, she married Walter Warren and moved out of Somerset to 2, Church Road, near Beauvoir Square, Hackney, a street described by Charles Booth as “Middle Class. Well-to-do” with “2-1/2 storied semi-detached yellow-brick, slate roofed houses with long gardens behind.”<sup>4</sup> They employed one servant and gave lodgings to Walter’s 15-year-old nephew Augustus. The young Mrs Warren, it seemed, was destined for a relatively comfortable life in London as the wife of a commercial traveller.

On 26 March 1844, however, the marriage ended abruptly when Walter died of encephalitis at a coaching inn in Leeds, leaving his wife widowed at the age of 33.<sup>5</sup> Quite possibly, Warren’s death compelled Eliza to pursue writing as a professional career. In 1846-47, she published three fancywork manuals, *The Point-Lace Crochet Collar Book*, *The Court Crochet Doyley Book* and *The Court Crochet Collar and Cuff Book*, followed by a short-lived illustrated series of *Books of the Boudoir* on crochet and knitting in 1848.<sup>6</sup> Her earliest known appearances in the periodical press also date from this period. In 1847-48, she contributed over fifty fancywork items with instructions to the *Drawing-room Magazine*, subtitled “*Ladies Book of Fancy Needlework and Choice Literature*,” a monthly published by Houlston and Stoneman that ceased to appear after two volumes. The cover of Mrs Warren’s 1856 *Cookery for Maids of All Work* identifies her as “editress of the Drawing Room Magazine,”

but there is not internal evidence to confirm this. Issues contained about thirty pages and offered illustrated fancywork instructions in addition to fiction, poetry and essays targeting a female readership such as “Shakespeare’s Female Characters,” “The Poetry of Flowers,” and “The Spirit of Needlework,” about the benefits of ornamental needlework for women. All fancywork patterns were labelled as having been “Designed by Mrs. Warren” and included not only clothing items such as the “Knitted Opera Cap with Netted Border” and the “Gentlemen’s Comforter in Crochet,” but also many pieces for home use: a “Knitted Shell Mat,” a “Toilet Cushion, Oak Leaf Pattern,” a “Pen Wiper,” and a “Music Stool Covering in Crochet.” Advertisements in the *Ladys’ Newspaper* invited readers to come to “Mrs. Warren’s Needlework Showrooms” in Fleet Street, where lessons were given and designs included in the *Drawing-room Magazine* could be “viewed eight days prior to their publication.”<sup>7</sup>

By 1851, Eliza Warren had left Church Road and taken up more humble lodgings. The census held in March lists her as living in St Mary Lambeth at 15, Dorset Place North, the house of solicitor Thomas Overend.<sup>8</sup> Her profession is given as “Authoress,” the only instance in which census records mention her literary activities. On 13 September 1851, Warren became the wife of Frederic Francis, a 40-year-old landing-waiter in Her Majesty’s Customs.<sup>9</sup> Remarrying must have improved her financial status considerably. The couple left Lambeth for the rapidly urbanizing area of Deptford New Town, where they occupied a generously proportioned semi-detached house at 4, Brunswick Place.<sup>10</sup> Retaining the name under which she had started to build her reputation in the 1840s, “Mrs Warren” continued to publish throughout the next decade. *The Short-way Crochet Edging Book* appeared in 1850. The following year, she launched *Timethrift; or All Hours Turned to Good Account*, her first public attempt at establishing a magazine under her own name. It was published by

Longmans and sold at six shillings, but ceased publication after six issues. Borrowing its motto, “All is the gift of industry; whate’er exalts, embellishes, and renders life delightful,” from the eighteenth-century poet James Thomson, it provided literary entertainment, household tips and fancywork designs to middle-class women. Like the *Drawing-room Magazine*, each issue started with two pages of illustrations of clothing items and decorative objects such as collars, watch-pockets, toilet covers and baskets, followed by detailed instructions of how readers could make these items. The rest of the issue offers a taste of the ingredients that would later contribute to the success of the *Ladies’ Treasury*: fiction, poetry, monthly sections of “Useful Knowledge,” “Feminine Gatherings,” and “Anecdotes” often harvested from magazines such as *Household Words* and *Bentley’s Miscellany*, a cookery column entitled “The Epicure,” which Warren recuperated in the *Treasury* for 1861-65, and general articles on, for example, Babylon, modern Rome, life expectancy in Europe, “The German Book Mart,” and “Peeps into the Literary Circle of London.” In the final issue, Warren informed subscribers that *Timethrift* could also be obtained as a gift book for 1s., 6d. from the publishers Ward and Lock, “forming [...] a suitable ornament for the drawing-room, a phasing companion for a studious hour, and a useful and domestic work, [...] peculiarly adapted” by the author “for recommendation to persons of any age” and “exceedingly appropriate as an elegant souvenir.”<sup>11</sup> The book, which for unknown reasons did not appear until 1854, was a bound copy of the magazine reissued with a new cover page and subtitle, “*Leisure Hours for Ladies*.”

In 1849, the newspapers announced that Mrs Warren, “the celebrated Artiste in Fancy Needlework,” “ha[d] undertaken the superintendence of the Work-Table Department”<sup>12</sup> of R. K. Philp’s recently established *Family Friend*. A few years later, she was joined by her colleague Mrs Pullan, with whom she co-authored *Treasures in Needlework*,

published by Ward and Lock in 1855. The 450-page collection consisted of patterns published in the *Family Friend*, each presented under the same heading used by the magazine, “The Work-Table Friend.” In their introduction, Warren and Pullan advertized their periodical work by referring readers for “whatever elucidations may be needed of any work or design in these pages” to “the current numbers of the ‘*Family Friend*’.” In February 1856, shortly after Pullan had stopped contributing patterns, the magazine similarly announced a more interactive approach to fancywork instruction:

The needlework department of the “Family Friend” will be henceforth conducted with a view to encourage the Art of Designing Patterns as well as assisting those who aim at the Execution of the very beautiful and useful designs that grace our pages. Measures, therefore, will be taken to award appropriate acknowledgements of merit to all expert Lady Needleworkers who either Design Patterns or work out those that we publish.<sup>13</sup>

That the plan was abandoned before being put into practice – the needlework patterns in the issues for March and April are unsigned – may have been the result of recent events in Eliza Francis’s personal life. Although still in his forties, Frederic Francis realized that his life was nearing its end. On 12 April 1856, he drew up a will naming his “truly beloved and affectionate wife Eliza Francis” as executor and sole beneficiary. Francis died less than two months later of “Exhaustion from Acute Mania and Phlegmonous Erysipelas” at Peckham House Lunatic Asylum.<sup>14</sup> Mrs Warren continued to supply patterns to the *Family Friend* up until 1861, when she was already busy editing her own *Ladies’ Treasury*.<sup>15</sup>

Left to provide for herself after losing a husband for the second time in little over a decade, Eliza Warren Francis quit Deptford to set up a boarding house at Tudor Road in the parish of Penge, Surrey. If the first half of her life was marked by movement and change, the final half was spent in relative stability: all census records from 1861 through 1891 list “Eliza

Francis" as living as a "Boarding" or "Lodging House Keeper" at Tudor Road with a varying number of boarders.<sup>16</sup> For Eliza Warren Francis the author however, the two decades following the death of her second husband proved the busiest and most prolific of her writing career, with household, fancywork and other manuals appearing at a steady pace: *Cookery for Maids of All Work* (1856), *Elegant Work for Delicate Fingers* (1861), co-authored with Mrs Pullan and Madame Girardin of the *Family Treasury*, *A Scheme for the Education of the Daughters of Working Men* (1862), *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* (1864), *How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage* (1865), *Comfort for Small Incomes* (1866), *A House and Its Furnishings* (1869), *The Art of Imitating Oil Paintings Without a Knowledge of Drawing* (1869) and *The Way It Is Done* (1878). "Mrs Warren" had become a brand name in English and American households and in the publishing world, inspiring admiration and respect as well as satirical commentary and mild ridicule. Her advice on budget management in particular attracted attention. The *Girl's Own Paper* published offshoots entitled "How I Managed My Picnic" and "My 'At Home' and How I Managed It," and the *London Society* and the *Churchman's Shilling Magazine* both printed fictional accounts of young adults who, after reading Mrs Warren's books, rise to the challenge of living on limited incomes.<sup>17</sup> Already in 1857, in a page-long piece entitled "All Work and Some Play," *Punch* had mocked the occasional *double entendre* in *Cookery for Maids of All Work*: "'A table-spoonful of Browning to the calf's-head soup' (p. 51) may be tried, but we never found that gentleman's writings at all suited to a calf's head."<sup>18</sup>

Another attempt to establish a women's magazine finally succeeded. First published by Ward and Lock in 1857, the *Ladies' Treasury* became one of the most successful publications of its genre, only rivalled by the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. It was soon advertised as "the best of all the household magazines" throughout the press, and

reviews were generally positive, praising its “well-selected admixture” of articles, “literary excellence,” and “superior specimens of wood engraving.”<sup>19</sup> There is no archive of correspondence and personal papers like the Beetons’ to document Warren Francis’s management of the *Treasury*, but a surviving letter dated 8 October 1888 does offer some insight. Signed “EWFrancis,” it is addressed to Lucy E. Baxter (1837-1902), art critic and foreign correspondent of the *Magazine of Art* in Florence.<sup>20</sup> From the early 1860s onwards, Baxter had been a regular contributor of serial fiction to the *Ladies’ Treasury* under her usual pen name “Leader Scott.” The letter discusses two recent submissions by Baxter: a “tale on Temperance,” which although “a good one will not do for the L Treasury,” and a story about the queen of Italy, for which Warren Francis is prepared to pay a guinea, if Baxter agrees to an abridged version.<sup>21</sup>

The Queen of Italy – without taking your MS. From the roll I at once got an engraving full page of her Majesty, but on reading the MS – I find it too long. The readers of the Treasury will not care to be told how Florence looks on Xmas Eve – αεα – Even the names of the grand dames of the Queen’s Court will be unpronounceable by English readers (of the Treasury). [...] Many of the anecdotes have been the run of the English papers notably the white dress from Paris α the pearls – but not the visit to the Artist’s studio – However the article cannot appear till Feby.

What Warren Francis’s rejection of Baxter’s first submission and her incisive comments on the second show is that, as an established magazine in the 1880s, the *Ladies’ Treasury* was by no means pressed for new material. “Upwards of 300 MSS came in reply to one Advt. for tales,” Warren Francis boasts, informing Baxter that “A MS has been sent from Hungary – another from Corsica – one from Venice. I believe the Treasury circulates all over the world.” That Eliza Warren had become something of a celebrity herself is evident from the fact that

the letter was later sent by Baxter to her niece, a Miss Scofield, in reply to a request for autographs. Together with specimens by William Allingham and Jessie Fothergill, Baxter gave her “a letter from Mrs Warren-Francis Editress of ‘Ladies Treasury’ and author of ‘How I managed my house on £300 a year.’”<sup>22</sup>

In the first years of the *Treasury’s* existence, Mrs Warren was a prominent contributor to the fancywork department, but her editorial function – shared with at least one unknown co-editor – remained undisclosed. It was not until 1861, after the magazine had moved to Cassell, Petter and Galpin, that she openly took sole charge. In December of that year, a new series was announced, to be published by Houlston and Wright. In 1867, the magazine found its final publisher in Bemrose. Addressing an audience of middle-class women, the *Ladies’ Treasury* offered a blend of fiction, poetry and essays on various subjects as well as fancywork instructions and patterns, full-colour fashion plates and fashion news, recipes, gardening tips and amusement. “There is one attraction it possesses over its rivals, and which especially recommends it to the domestic circle,” the press commented, “and that is, the pleasant blending of amusement and instruction which characterise all its articles. Everything seems written with the decided and direct aim of leaving the reader better informed or better hearted than she was before.”<sup>23</sup> Between 1868 and 1875, all fiction and articles of general interest were published separately in a periodical supplement entitled the *Treasury of Literature* – a bold move at a time when supplements to women’s magazines usually consisted of fashion plates, fancywork patterns or recipe cards. The *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* and its many imitators, moreover, limited themselves to providing scientific information that was immediately useful within a domestic context, introducing women to the basic notions of chemistry, matters of hygiene and nutrition, and the general principles of medicine.<sup>24</sup> The *Ladies’ Treasury* and its supplement, by contrast,



assumed a certain amount of acquired knowledge or at least inquisitiveness in their readers that often transcended prevailing ideas of domesticity and femininity. In doing so, it bore closer resemblance to family magazines such as *Bow Bells*, *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* and *Cassell's Magazine* than to other periodicals explicitly aiming at a female audience.<sup>25</sup> Articles on the exploration and use of petroleum and paraffin, and on the methods for spectrum analysis, for instance, were written as if they could be readily inserted in an encyclopedia. When the *Treasury of Literature* ceased to exist in 1875, this type of contribution was not abandoned, as it had been in 1861 by Beeton in the second series of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, but simply reinserted into the main magazine.<sup>26</sup>

We believe that the establishment of Mrs Warren's identity and the discovery of certain details about her life call for a thorough re-evaluation of her editorship of and contributions to the *Ladies' Treasury*. More specifically, we would like to draw attention to her abundant use of signatures and to the gendered performativity that characterizes much of her work in its search for a comfortable middle ground between fiction and reality. As Marie Maclean has argued with Genette, pseudonyms, and initials by extension, are "endlessly instructive" as paratext, "whether they represent an attempt to acquire *auctoritas* and *gravitas*, or an attempt to shed them."<sup>27</sup> The gender of these literary guises is of particular interest, because "it so clearly relates the circumstances of production to the editor, to the family, and to society, with its fashions and ideologies."<sup>28</sup> In the case of Eliza Warren Francis, authority is scattered among a myriad of gendered and apparently "genderless" voices through which she experimented with various social and cultural identities and forms of affiliation.

Knowing her maiden name as well as the names of her two husbands makes it possible to identify Warren Francis with reasonable certainty as the author of quite a

number of unattributed pieces in the magazine. Apart from the countless essays published under “Mrs Warren” and a handful signed “Eliza Warren,” “the editor” and “editress,” many contributions bear signatures that play with her names and initials: “Warren Francis,” “E.W. Francis,” “F.W. Francis” “E.W. Jervis,” “W.F. Jervis,” “E.J.W.F.,” “E.W.F.,” “J.W.F.,” “E.W.,” “E.F.,” “W.F.,” “E.” and “W.” Naturally, these signatures gave the *Ladies’ Treasury* the appearance of having more contributors than it actually had, although Warren Francis was careful never to relinquish the possibility of identification altogether. On a more sophisticated level, however, they also helped to sell the magazine’s heterogeneous contents by creating the illusion of a whole range of gendered authorial voices. Although caution is needed in making generalizations about a magazine that appeared for four decades, we do believe that certain patterns can be distinguished. Contributions of particular female concern on fancywork, cookery and household or on feminine topics usually carried female signatures. “The Queen as Maiden, Wife and Widow,” “The Wedding of the Bride of the Sea in Olympia” and “A Halfpenny A Day,” on charity, were signed “Eliza Warren.”<sup>29</sup> The “Fancy Work for Ladies” section, “Cookery for £200 a Year, and for Great and Lesser Incomes,” “Cookery for All Incomes” and “A Series of Family Dinners and How to Carve Them” were all by “Mrs Warren.”<sup>30</sup> In scientific essays on the health effects of tobacco use, coal formation in the Lower Amazons or the hibernation of insects, however, the more masculine and hence arguably more authoritative “Warren Francis” was adopted.<sup>31</sup> Pieces on photography, the early life of Charles Dickens and the history of Malaga were all signed with less obviously gendered initials, and “The Poets of the Seventeenth Century,” “What is Glass,” “The Fire at the Crystal Palace,” and “To Ventilate Rooms” were signed “the Editor.”<sup>32</sup> In these articles, characterized by their neutral tone, formal style and descriptive contents, “the Editor” often embodies a masculine figure of professional status. The piece on the

Crystal Palace takes the form of a journalistic eye-witness account,: “At the first rumour of fire in the Palace, every one seemed to disbelieve it or treat it lightly [...] But when the rumour deepened into certainty, every one in the neighbourhood hastened to the spot. When we arrived, the north end had fallen.”<sup>33</sup> That Warren Francis was able to report in detail on the fire that destroyed a portion of the famous glass building in December 1866 is not surprising considering the fact that she lived a five minutes’ walk from the grounds at Sydenham Hill, where it had been rebuilt after the Great Exhibition. In the piece on room ventilation, by contrast, she calls upon two male authorities, Dr. Arnott and Dr. Reid, to explain how the deleterious effects of burning gas in a closed room could be removed by placing through-the-wall ventilation tubes over each gas light, ensuring the continuous supply of fresh air. The instructions are detailed but not of the step-by-step type commonly used in the cooking or needlework sections. The predominantly female readership of the *Treasury*, after all, is not expected to set to work with tin pipes, hammer and chisel: they are encouraged to find “a sharp lad” to do it for them.<sup>34</sup>

Warren Francis’s editorial voice was similarly fragmented. Advertisements for back issues and bound volumes invited readers to send stamps direct to “the Editor,” while post-office orders had to be made payable to “Jervis Francis.” By turning her maiden name into a male first name, Warren Francis made it seem as if the magazine was employing a male clerk to take care of financial matters. As “the Editress” and “Mrs Warren,” by contrast, she wrote notices to correspondents requesting original designs in needlework and giving domestic tips and advice on cookery, fancywork, friendship, marriage and other personal issues. There she presented herself as a plain “Mrs,” a no-nonsense, hands-on expert discussing feminine topics as a woman directly writing to other women. She recommended “pure glycerine” as the “best remedy for chapped hands,” “ten drops of laudanum in a teaspoon of warm

water” to treat “inflamed eyelids” and “a soft flannel wetted with curd soap” to “clean ermine.”<sup>35</sup> “Mary E.” could purchase the “Anna Boleyn Braid” from “Messrs. Hutton & Co., 6 Newgate-street,” and a female correspondent writing under the name of “Ada” was warned: “Making presents to young men is very much to be deprecated, and an exchange of photographs should be avoided, unless there is an engagement.”<sup>36</sup> To “S.E.W.” she gave instructions on how to make “an excellent lemon pudding” and “M. Uckfield” was referred to an article “in the present number of the *Ladies’ Treasury*” for “the etymology of Jerusalem artichoke, and the best way to cook this vegetable.”<sup>37</sup> Occasionally, the answers were so terse that they only made sense to the person who had asked the question: “ROYAL CHARLIE is thanked for the hint,” “MINNIE. – Hot water always, winter and summer,” “ANCLES. – Consult a dancing master or mistress,” “WYE VIDE. – Cannot answer without first seeing.”<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps most intriguing in the context of her sparsely documented life are a number of poems “By the Editor” in the *Treasury* for 1857. Written before the disclosure of her editorship (if we may assume that she was indeed the author), they adopt a much more personal tone than any of her later contributions. A poem entitled “The Widow” in October 1857 seems to recall the early death of Frederick Francis, whom, as the date of his will suggests, his wife too may have “watched [...] feebly languish” (l. 17).

Some few years the rapture lasted,

Love on pure hearts can bestow;

Soon, to soon, pale sickness blasted

All their hopes of bliss below. (ll. 13-16)<sup>39</sup>

“A Sister’s Bridal” in the same issue may have been prompted by the marriage of Warren Francis’s sister Arabella to George Cresswell on 10 March 1857.<sup>40</sup> The poem shows a woman

struggling to accept her sister's wedding "break[ing] the holiest tie / That bound me to mankind" (ll. 3-4).

Through all the trying scenes of life

We have so loved each other,

That long my lonely heart will bleed

To give thee to another. (ll. 5-8)<sup>41</sup>

In February of the following year, "Fraternal Love" mourns "the bitter change" in the sisters' "dissevered lot. / Since thou art sad and suffering / And I can soothe thee not" (ll. 21-24).<sup>42</sup>

We cannot be certain that this poem was addressed to Arabella as well, but we do know that she lost her husband within three years after their marriage, since she is listed as a widow in the 1861 census. "The Mother and Daughter," finally, deals with child loss:

They came like a dream – like a dream they are gone,

But a dream far too sweet to be ever forgot;

In the midst of the crowd, they have left me alone

For to me all is loneliness, where they are not. (ll. 1-4)

The poem raises the inevitable question of Warren Francis's own motherhood. While none of the census records nor Frederic Francis's will mentions any living descendants, it is possible that children were born and died in between census years. Searches for children by the name of Warren or Frances in online birth and death registers for the period 1836-1861 did not yield any concrete evidence, but stillbirth or infant death would not necessarily have been recorded.

After she had dropped her anonymity, Warren Francis never returned to this level of intimacy. Her serial contributions on household management and child rearing in the *Ladies' Treasury*, which were collected shortly afterwards in the domestic manuals that would make

her famous, were all written in semi-fictional form. Unlike Isabella Beeton, whose *Book of Household Management* used the conventional prescriptive mode, Warren Francis adopted a number of authorial personae which, when mapped onto the details of her life, reveal a continual blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality. In 1863, she published a series of nine monthly instalments on “How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year,” followed by a longer sequence of fourteen contributions on “How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage” in 1864-65. Both feature widowed narrators who have lost one or more children. Milly Allison and her husband Frederick in “How I Managed My House” lose their infant daughter to croup after leaving her to the care of a negligent servant while going house hunting, Milly commenting: “Oh! the agony of a mother watching every life-throb of her dying child, the convulsion that cramps its little frame, the spasm which twists its pallid face, the battling of life and death, is a scene, once witnessed, never forgotten.”<sup>43</sup> Milly and Frederick subsequently move to a semi-detached house “only three miles from London,”<sup>44</sup> where two more children are born. There they live until Frederick’s death forces Milly to leave the house and seek a position as a housekeeper. “A woman who means to play her part well,” the series concludes, must be “a good manager, so that every duty shall have its allotted time,” “a good financier, so as to make not only every penny do its work, but occasionally the work of twopence” and “a good diplomatist, for concord, and comfort, and pleasant results should be the result of her management.”<sup>45</sup>

Mary, the narrator of “How I Managed My Children,” is a widowed mother of eight whose two eldest children die of consumption in adolescence. Her three daughters, Alice, Mary and Jane, are all proficient at needlework. Mary has a particular talent for drawing and, after sending illustrations to magazine editors and book publishers, eventually finds work as a wood engraver for children’s books. Both she and her sister Jane also prove to be

aspiring authors. Having searched “in vain in all the cookery books for some simple but certain rules for cooking,” Mary and her mother decide write their own. Jane marries a surgeon with whom she has seven children and lives in perfect happiness “until death [comes] and remove[s] the bread-winner of the flock.”<sup>46</sup> Luckily, her mother explains, Jane’s husband had designated his wife as the beneficiary of his life insurance, thus allowing her and the children to stay in the family home and lead a relatively comfortable life after his death. Jane discharges her servants and takes the management of the household into her own hands. When her mother asks her why she always gets up two hours before the rest of the family, she confesses:

Well, if you must know, dear mamma, I am turning author. You remember that Pope says, “Trifles make the sum of human life,” and indeed they make the sum and comfort of a home, and although I thought I knew everything when I was married, experience showed me how little I knew of the importance of *trifles*. Great doors turn on small hinges, and great comforts hinge on little matters. And so, mamma, being willing and desirous, and so forth, to help others by removing certain sharp pebbles which sometimes unawares pull one up, I have written down my experiences in a book, which I mean to call

“THE BOOK OF HOME COMFORTS FOR SMALL INCOMES,”

and you must not see till it is printed.

Despite her mother’s remonstrance that “it is an awful thing to appear in print, Janet; and how will you get it published?”<sup>47</sup> Jane is confident that her sister Mary in London will help her to succeed. The narrator’s task as a mother ends here. She has “managed [her] children to set them out in life, and they in turn are doing their best to train theirs in every good and

useful work, having no unseemly ignorant pride, but a very high notion of the 'DIGNITY OF LABOUR.'"<sup>48</sup>

If it is tempting to look for parallels between the life and writings of Eliza Warren Francis, it is not only because we have little else besides her books and few letters to document her life, but more importantly because Warren Francis herself invites such speculation by deliberately causing confusion about the fictional character of her works. To the title of the book Jane has written in "How I Managed My Children," she adds a footnote stating: "This book will be published shortly, of which due notice will be given in the Correspondence column of the LADIES' TREASURY."<sup>49</sup> *Comfort for Small Incomes* by Mrs Warren appeared in 1866, but was first serialized as "Mrs. Janet Wynter's Experiences in Housekeeping" in the *Treasury* for June-December 1865. Likewise, Warren Francis inserted a passage in the book edition of *How I Managed My Children* in which Mary and her daughter decide to call their cookery book *The Epicure*, "because the word signified all that was excellent but not luxurious or extravagant."<sup>50</sup> "The Epicure," however, was the cooking column in the *Ladies' Treasury* for 1861-65 recovered by Warren Francis from *Timethrift*. A book version by "Mrs Warren" is advertised on the dust jacket of *How I Managed My Children*, but it was never published.<sup>51</sup> Also announced is a series of six *Cards for the Kitchen* explaining the basic rules of cooking. Attached by means of a wire, these cards were designed by Warren Francis to be hung up in the kitchen. In "Comfort for Small Incomes," however, it is aspiring author Jane who comes up with this plan, and a footnote promises that the cards "will be ready in February 1866."<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Mrs Warren in her capacity of editor of the *Ladies' Treasury* announced in a footnote to an unsigned three-part series on the "Education of Daughters of Working Men" in 1862 that she had "made arrangements with the author [...] to supply in the column of the EPICURE [...] copious information"<sup>53</sup> on the



art of cooking. That same year, however, Houlston and Wright published *A Scheme for the Education of the Daughters of Working Men* by E. Warren Francis, thereby revealing perhaps not to Victorian readers, but certainly to us now, that she had been staging a conversation with herself in the role of external contributor to her own magazine.

Rather than using her regular signature “Mrs Warren,” Warren Francis chose to sign “How I Managed My House” “by the mother of a family” and most instalments of “How I Managed My Children” “by a mother.” Clearly, she used the epithets to underline her authority on such domestic matters. Yet, while her fame was based on her status as a respectable wife and mother, we now know that she was a widow with no living children who had gathered experience elsewhere. The eldest of six surviving children, she would of course have been expected to share in the care of her brothers and sisters. Her household responsibilities, however, may have been particularly heavy, not only because she did not have any sisters close to her in age to assist her, but also because, as a rare childhood letter reveals, her mother’s health had started to deteriorate when she was barely eleven.<sup>54</sup> As a result, Warren Francis would have been aware at a young age that her father’s unstable draping business made the family’s financial situation precarious, requiring the prudent budget management that she later advocated in her manuals.<sup>55</sup> Census records also show her watching over young relatives and friends at various stages in her life, including her husband’s nephew in 1841, 17-year-old Walter Wheeler in 1861, and her 15-year-old niece Ada Jervis in 1871.<sup>56</sup> As a boarding-house keeper, moreover, she built up years of experience in running a busy household of mostly single or widowed women of independent means whose age ranged from 16 to 80 years. Finally, several advertisements in the *Daily News* in the 1880s and 90s reveal a genuine commitment to the training of young servants. Amidst dozens of wanted ads for “plain” cooks of unspecified age, most of them placed by women

who did “pay servants to their domestic work for them,” those by Mrs Francis of 6, Tudor Road, Upper Norwood, stick out by offering the position to a country girl “who will be taught cooking.” In “On the Training of Servants” in the *Ladies’ Treasury* Warren Francis likewise advised: “Sixteen is about the best age to take a country girl to train her to be either cook or house-parlour maid. Either may be accomplished without the mistress actually doing the servant’s work; but to become a teacher one must perfectly understand household in all its branches.”<sup>57</sup> Earlier, she had written about cookery and the importance of good servants in *My Lady-Help, and What She Taught Me* (1877) and *How the Lady-help Taught Girls to Cook and Be Useful* (1879).

Ironically, having no husband and no children to raise not only gave Eliza Warren Francis the precious time needed – the metaphorical “room of her own” – to pursue successful careers in writing and editing; it may also have been a crucial factor in the development of the fictionalized and mediated authorial voices that typify her domestic writings. Milly Allison and Mary and her daughters all share Warren Francis’s talents for fancywork, drawing, writing, reading; all show a similarly strong concern for frugality and common sense; and three of them find themselves widowed at some points in their lives. But significantly they also have what Warren Francis herself evidently lacked: a household in the strict sense of the word to “manage on £200 a year” and children to raise “from infancy to marriage.” By turning fictional characters into the authors of her own books and contributions to the *Ladies’ Treasury*, Warren Francis relegated her own voice in order to legitimize it. Through these characters, she was able to reinforce her claim to expertise. While undoubtedly compensatory on a personal level, this displacement of authorship was also a conscious marketing strategy of a commercially clever entrepreneur who knew that

the success of her writings and of the *Treasury* depended on maintaining her reputation of being someone who knew from personal experience.

Only once did Eliza Warren Francis come close to revealing her identity to her readers, backing out just in time by means of a characteristic twist: “It is necessary sometimes to establish one’s identity,” she began her “Editor’s New Year’s Address” for 1886. “I am led to this remark in consequence of being so often in letters addressed as ‘Sir.’ I have not, however, the least pretension to the intellectual superiority of man. I am simply Mrs. Warren.” The statement seems appropriately modest for a Victorian woman, but at the same time it is surprisingly self-assertive. Confirming her sex to her readers, Warren Francis claims credit for independently running, as a woman, a successful women’s journal for decades. The following paragraph captures the depth of her commitment:

It is often customary in married life, after twenty-five years of union, to celebrate the epoch as “Silver Wedding.” For twenty-seven years my connection with THE LADIES’ TREASURY has been unsevered. For twenty-five I have been its sole editor, therefore I would consecrate this term of years as *Silver, nay, Golden Memory*, for the employment has been a labour of love, dispersing troubles into “thin air.”

Here, as so often, Warren Francis defines herself in terms of her professional life: she is married to the journal that she has been editing on her own for 25 years, calling it “a labour of love, dispersing troubles” – childlessness and early widowhood as well as their financial repercussions – “into ‘thin air.’”

Warren Francis’s publication rhythm flagged in the 1880s – the only two books published that decade, *A Young Wife’s Perplexities* (1886) and *Cookery for an income of £200 a year* (1887) would turn out to be her last – and in 1895 her alliance with the *Ladies’*

*Treasury* ended two years short of its ruby anniversary. Her final years were spent in quiet retirement. Now in her eighties, she was no longer able to maintain the busy professional life that she had been leading for so long. Her last public appearance was by proxy in 1896, when Ellen T. Masters, a young colleague in fancywork instruction, set up the Eliza Warren Fund, urging readers in the columns of Walter Besant's *Author* to donate. The initiative was quickly picked up by other journals. *Heart and Home* deplored her being "in indigent circumstances after a lifetime of toil with her pen" and the *Athenaeum* commented:

We are sorry to hear that Mrs. Eliza Warren, one of the pioneers of women's journalism, whose writings on cookery and domestic management are well known, has become – owing to the discontinuance of the *Ladies' Treasury*, which she edited, in spite of her eighty-three years, till the end of 1895, and other circumstances over which she has no control – sadly pressed by money troubles. She has passed her long life in working for others, who are now unable to help her, and, owing to the infirmities of advanced age, she can no longer support herself by her pen as she has hitherto done.<sup>58</sup>

Despite donations by Besant, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Warren's former publisher Bemrose and Leopold de Rothschild of the famous banking family, only £60 was raised. "It would be best, perhaps," the *National Observer* pondered, "if the literary class were to form a sustentation fund of its own, and no longer be indebted to the Civil List, the Royal Literary Fund, or any other such eleemosynary institution."<sup>59</sup>

Eliza Warren Francis died on 5 January 1900 at her house in Tudor Road, aged 89. The cause of death on her death certificate is given as "Morbus Cordis many years Senility," indicating that no direct cause had been found besides the infirmities of old age.<sup>60</sup> For all her dedication to the *Ladies' Treasury* and for all her fame as a manual writer, the press made no

mention of her death. Quite likely only a small circle of acquaintances knew that, with Eliza Warren Francis, “Mrs Warren” had died as well. She was, after all, what Alexis Easley has called a “first-person anonymous” in the nineteenth-century literary world, a woman author and editor who deliberately “construct[ed] and subvert[ed] notions of individual authorial identity, manipulating the publishing conventions associated with various print media for personal and professional advantage.”<sup>61</sup> Even today, despite renewed interest in Victorian women’s writings and periodicals, the full measure of her works remains to be taken.

---

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman, eds., *Victorian Women’s Magazines* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton* (New York: Knopf, 2006), pp. 321, 235.

<sup>3</sup> Christening record for Eliza Jervis (I01821-3), International Genealogical Index, *FamilySearch* (Record Search Pilot), <http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch/start.html> (accessed May-June 2010). Eliza Jervis writes to her uncle John Honiball in November 1826: “I am now 16 years old the 23<sup>rd</sup> [?] of Dec<sup>r</sup>.” (John Honiball, Correspondence 1811-37 (12 ALS A256f), William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.) We are grateful to Gabriele Mohale of the William Cullen Library for kindly sending us scans of the letters.

<sup>4</sup> Marriage of Eliza Jervis and Walter Warren, 30 June 1836, St Cuthbert, Wells, Somerset Marriages (post-1754), Somerset & Dorset Family History Society, online at [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (accessed 17 May 2010). 1841 census record for Eliza Warren (HO107/700/7 f. 29 p. 2), *Census Returns of England and Wales* (Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Public Record Office). “Notes on De Beauvoir by Charles Booth,” transcribed by Paul Bolding, De Beauvoir Association, <http://www.debeauvoir.org.uk/dbabooth.html> (accessed 17 June 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Certificate of Registration of Death for Walter Warren, General Register Office, London, DYC 826967.

<sup>6</sup> We have not been able to trace any surviving copies of the *Book of the Boudoir*. The book is advertised in the *Lady’s Newspaper* for 26 August, 2, 9 and 23 September and 21 October 1848.

<sup>7</sup> *Lady’s Newspaper*, 24 June 1848-13 January 1849, p. 1.

---

<sup>8</sup> 1851 census record for Eliza Warren (HO107/1573 f. 322 p. 10). The census records for Eliza Warren (1851) and Eliza Francis (1861-91) were located by Dr. Kate Macdonald, Ghent University, Belgium. See also Kate Macdonald and Jolein De Ridder, "Mrs Warren's professions: Eliza Warren Francis (c. 1810-1900), Editor of the *Ladies' Treasury* (1857-1895) and London Boarding-House Keeper" (forthcoming in *Publishing History*).

<sup>9</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 22 November 1851, p. 8. 1851 census record for Frederic Francis (HO107/1573 f. 528 p. 24).

<sup>10</sup> Will of Frederic Francis, Searcher Landing Waiter of Customs of No 4 Brunswick Place Lewisham Road New Cross, Kent, TNA, PROB 11/2238, quire 651-700, f. 318. Brunswick Place was a development on Lewisham Way consisting of "three pairs of semi-detached houses with long sloping roofs" built in 1806 ("Special Case Study: St John's, Deptford New Town," *Ideal Homes: Suburbia in Focus*, University of Greenwich, <http://www.ideal-homes.org.uk/lewisham/main/st-johns-deptford-new-town-case-study.htm> (accessed 15 May 2010)). The houses still exist, but the space between each pair was filled up by four-storey brick buildings in the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>11</sup> *Timethrift*, December 1851, p.192.

<sup>12</sup> *Northern Star*, 24 February 1849, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Family Friend*, February 1856, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> Will of Frederic Francis. Certificate of Registration of Death for Frederic Francis, General Register Office, NYC 827057. See also *Morning Chronicle*, 3 June 1856, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> All contributions to the "Work Table Friend" for 1862-63 are unsigned. The new series starting in 1864 has a "Ladies' Department" conducted by "Madame Rosalie," which contains beauty and fashion tips as well as needlework patterns under the subheading "The Work Table."

<sup>16</sup> Census records for Eliza Francis (1861, RG9/451 f. 156 p. 8; 1871, RG10/850 f. 23, p. 39; 1881, RG11/822 f. 103 p. 48; 1891, RG12/598 f. 16 p. 25).

<sup>17</sup> "Lotty's Experiences. How She Tried to Manage her House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year," *London Society* (November 1865): pp. 432-445; Huntley Smyth, "'The Vexed Question': Can I Marry On £300 A Year?" *Churchman's Shilling Magazine* (March 1868): pp. 46-60; Dora Hope, "How I Managed My Picnic," *Girls Own Paper* (21 August 1880): pp. 536-7; "My 'At Home' and How I Managed It," *Girl's Own Paper* (9 February 1884): pp. 289-9.

<sup>18</sup> "All Work and Some Play," *Punch*, 1 August 1857, p. 48.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Illustrated Review*, November 1872, p. 271; *Eclectic Review*, November 1860, p. 550.

<sup>20</sup> The letter is now in the possession of Marianne Van Remoortel, Ghent University, Belgium.

<sup>21</sup> "The Domestic Life of Margherita, Queen of Italy" by "Leader Scott" was published with a full-page engraving in the *Ladies' Treasury* for February 1889, pp. 67-74.

<sup>22</sup> Autograph Letter Signed ("Lucy E Baxter | Leader Scott") to "Miss Scofield," 19 January 1889, Catalogue of Richard M. Ford Ltd., Antiquarian bookseller, London, <http://www.richardfordmanuscripts.co.uk/catalogue> (accessed 25 November 2010).

<sup>23</sup> "Opinions of the Press in 1866," *Ladies' Treasury*, December 1866, p. 354.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Noakes, "The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine," *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical*, [http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/sciper/browse/ED\\_desc.html](http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/sciper/browse/ED_desc.html) (accessed 30 November 2009). Sally Shuttleworth, Gowan Dawson and Richard Noakes, "Women, Science and Culture: Science in the Nineteenth-century Periodical," *Women: A Cultural Review* 12.1 (2001): p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> In a notice to correspondents, Mrs Warren reassured "Tom D." that the magazine received "many enquiries from men, who seem to read the *Ladies' Treasury* as much as women do, and frequently ask for information on some topics" (*Ladies' Treasury*, May 1890, p. 320).

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the *Treasury of Literature* see Jolein De Ridder, "What? How? Why?: Broadening the Mind with the *Treasury of Literature* (1868-1875), Supplement to the *Ladies' Treasury* (1857-1895), *Victorian Periodicals Review* 43.2 (2010): pp. 174-95, and Jolein De Ridder and Marianne Van Remoortel, "From Fashion Colours to Spectrum Analysis: Negotiating Femininities in Mid-Victorian Women's Magazines," *Women's History Review* (forthcoming in 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Marie Maclean, "Pre-texts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral," *New Literary History* 22.2 (1991): p. 276.

<sup>28</sup> Maclean, p. 276.

<sup>29</sup> "The Queen as Maiden, Wife and Widow," *Ladies' Treasury*, October 1887, pp. 575-78; "The Wedding of the Bride of the Sea in Olympia," *Ladies' Treasury*, July 1892, pp. 421-23; "A Halfpenny A Day," *Ladies' Treasury*, July 1892, pp. 417-18.

<sup>30</sup> "Fancy Work for Ladies," *Ladies' Treasury*, March-January 1857-61; "Cookery for £200 a Year, and for Greater and Lesser Incomes," *Ladies' Treasury*, February-December 1869; "Cookery for All Incomes," *Ladies' Treasury*,

---

January-December 1870; "A Series of Family Dinners and How to Carve Them," *Ladies' Treasury*, January-July 1871.

<sup>31</sup> Warren Francis, "Is the Use of Tobacco Injurious?" *Ladies' Treasury*, December 1872, pp. 289-91; Warren Francis, "Vegetation on the Waters of the Lower Amazon," *Ladies' Treasury*, February 1873, pp. 71-2; Warren Francis, "The Hybernation of Insects," *Ladies' Treasury*, December 1874, pp. 298-9.

<sup>32</sup> E.W.F., "The Daguerreotype, the Photograph and the Stereoscope," *Ladies' Treasury*, July 1876, pp. 387-8; W.F., "The Early Life of Charles Dickens," *Ladies' Treasury*, January 1872, pp. 29-33; E.W.F., "Malaga," *Ladies' Treasury*, July 1873, pp. 21-3; The Editor, "The Poets of the Seventeenth Century," *Ladies' Treasury*, September 1866, pp. 159-61; The Editor, "What is Glass?" *Ladies' Treasury*, September 1875, pp. 128-31; The Editor, "The Fire at the Crystal Palace," *Ladies' Treasury*, February 1867, pp. 85-7; The Editor, "To Ventilate Rooms," *Ladies' Treasury*, June 1864, pp. 181-2.

<sup>33</sup> "The Fire at the Crystal Palace," pp. 85.

<sup>34</sup> "To Ventilate Rooms," p. 182.

<sup>35</sup> "Notices to Correspondents," *Ladies' Treasury*, May 1869, p. 80; November 1864, p. 352; December 1864, p. 380.

<sup>36</sup> "Notices to Correspondents," *Ladies' Treasury*, February 1862, p. 64; June 1863, p. 172.

<sup>37</sup> "Notices to Correspondents," *Ladies' Treasury*, February 1865, p. 63; November 1865, p. 351.

<sup>38</sup> "Notices to Correspondents," *Ladies' Treasury*, October 1862, p. 320; October 1864, p. 320; June 1866, p. 363.

<sup>39</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, October 1857, p. 230.

<sup>40</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 16 May 1857, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, October 1857, p. 236.

<sup>42</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, February 1858, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, January 1863, p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, February 1863, p. 70.

<sup>45</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, September 1863, p. 255.

<sup>46</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, May 1865, p. 139.

<sup>47</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, May 1865, p. 139.



---

<sup>48</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, May 1865, p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, May 1865, p. 139.

<sup>50</sup> Mrs Warren, *How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1865), p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> Warren Francis discontinued the column in the *Treasury* after discovering that her recipes had been copied by American women's magazines. These pirated columns in turn had been collected in an English cookery book "as the property of the lady who compiled it" (*Ladies' Treasury*, January 1869, p. 2). We found an announcement for *The Epicure* by Mrs Warren published by Putnam & Son in the *American Literary Gazette and Publisher's Circular* for 15 April 1869 (p. 394), but this may have been pirated as well. "The Epicure" was reintroduced into the *Treasury* in January 1895. In December, the final issue of the magazine, Warren Francis announced "It is purposed to continue this article in book form by Mrs. Warren" (p. 841), but the plan was never executed.

<sup>52</sup> *Ladies' Treasury*, December 1865, p. 368.

<sup>53</sup> "A Scheme for the Education of Daughters of Working Men," *Ladies' Treasury*, April 1862, p. 111.

<sup>54</sup> Eliza's three sisters were christened in 1819, 1820 and 1822 respectively (Christening records for Catharine, Jane and Arabella Jervis (I018215, I01821-6, I01821-6), International Genealogical Index, *FamilySearch* (Record Search Pilot), <http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch/start.html> (accessed May-June 2010). "My dear Mother was taken violently ill about 4 years ago and since that time has been much worse." (Letter to John Honiball (November 1826). John Honiball Correspondence 1811-37 (12 ALS A256f), William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.)

<sup>55</sup> John Jervis was declared bankrupt in 1841 (*London Gazette*, 23 November 1841, p. 2993).

<sup>56</sup> In his will, Frederic Francis expressed the wish that his wife would continue to devote her "Motherlike" love to a "dear talented boy" named Walter Wheeler. The characterization of Warren Francis's affection for the boy as "motherlike" seems to confirm that she had no children of her own to take care of.

<sup>57</sup> E. Warren, "On the Training of Servants," *Ladies' Treasury*, February 1885, p. 92. Warren Francis is obviously speaking from her own experience, but presents the account as reported to her by referring to "a lady who will not take servants of the usual description," and instead "trains girls of sixteen to work in a methodical and

---

intelligent manner; she will not take them older, says they are not ‘trainable,’ but permeated with bad advice and slovenly ideas” (p. 92).

<sup>58</sup> *Hearth and Home*, 15 October 1896, p. 837; “Literary Gossip,” *Athenaeum*, 16 May 1896, p. 652.

<sup>59</sup> “The Literary Looker-On,” *National Observer*, 28 November 1896, p. 43.

<sup>60</sup> Certificate of Registration of Death for Eliza Warren Francis, General Register Office, NYC 737933.

<sup>61</sup> Alexis Easley, *First-person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 2.