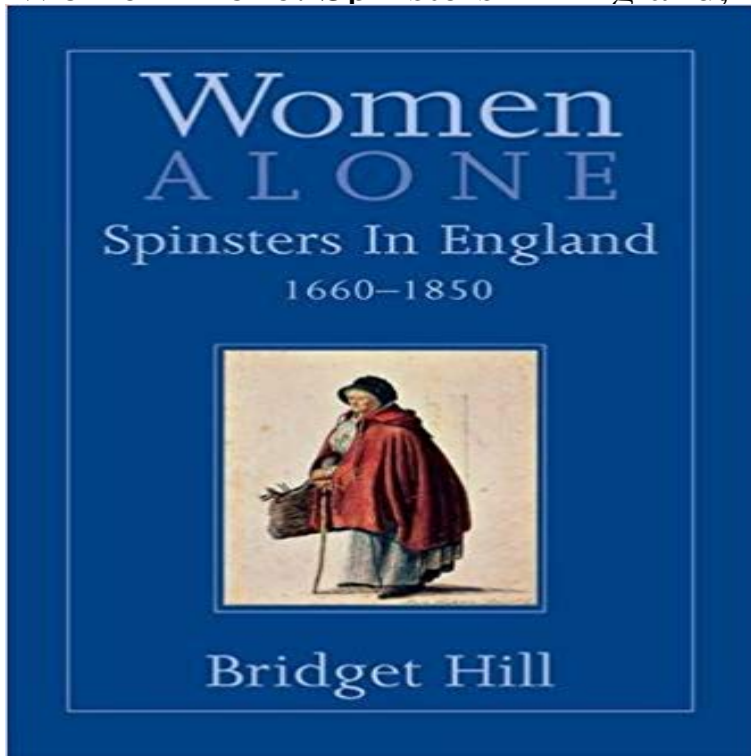


Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850



We know very little about spinsters in earlier times, for the stigma attached to the unmarried state often rendered these women almost invisible. Now this fascinating book opens a window into the lives of English spinsters in the mid-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, assessing the opportunities open to them and the restrictions placed upon them within different social classes, occupations and periods. Bridget Hill examines how often spinsters were able to earn enough money to live independently, what provision the Poor Law made for them if they did not, whether extreme poverty led to their involvement in crime or prostitution, and, if they stayed in the parental home, what kind of lives they led. She looks at the part single women played in religious organisations and the role of friendship and letter writing in their daily lives. She describes the nature of close relationships between women, some lesbian but many others not. Exploring the spinsters possibilities of escape from restrictive lives - particularly by emigration or cross-dressing - she discusses how successful these were. She provides details about the degree of surveillance single women suffered from the authorities and how often they were seen as a threat to social order. Finally she addresses the question of whether all spinsters of this era were suffering victims, potential viragoes - or neither. Bridget Hill was until her retirement staff tutor in history at the Open University.

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