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Making English Morals

Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in
England, 1787-1886

M. J. D. ROBERTS

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Campaigns for moral reform were a recurrent and distinctive feature of public life in later Georgian and Victorian England. Antislavery, temperance, charity organisation, cruelty prevention, 'social purity' advocates and more – all promoted their causes through the mobilisation of citizen volunteer support. This book sets out to explore the world of these volunteer networks, their foci of concern, their patterns of recruitment, their methods of operation, and the responses they aroused. In its exploration of this culture of self-consciously altruistic associational effort, the book provides the first systematic survey of moral reform movements as a distinct tradition of citizen action over the period, as well as casting light on the formation of a middle-class culture torn, in this stage of economic and political nation-building, between acceptance of a market-organised society and unease about the cultural consequences of doing so. This is a revelatory book that is both compelling and accessible.

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Making English Morals

*Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in
England, 1787–1886*

M. J. D. Roberts

Macquarie University



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Preface

This is a book driven into existence by curiosity about moral change. Who decides that contemporary moral values, current standards of behaviour, are repugnant? What experiences promote this sensitivity? What experiences and mental processes trigger attempts to promote moral change – attempts often met with indifference, hostility, ridicule and failure? And under what circumstances, by what methods, do the morally sensitive manage to persuade the indifferent, and overcome the hostile, when they do achieve recognition? ‘Nothing is more difficult perhaps than to explain how and why, or why not, a new moral perception becomes effective in action. Yet nothing is more urgent if an academic historical exercise is to become a significant investigation of human behavior.’*

This, then, is a study of people seeking moral reform – and about the associations they formed, the campaigns they fought, and the responses they achieved. The leading characters will be relatively familiar to the reader. The list begins with William Wilberforce and concludes with Josephine Butler and the crusading journalist W. T. Stead. The volunteer associations which these recognised historical figures led, and relied upon to achieve their goals, will, to most, be less familiar – as will some of the goals themselves.

It is hoped that the book itself may prove useful in three ways. Given the variety of causes canvassed and the complexity of their organisation, my first purpose has been to tell a story – to establish a chronology of organised moral reform activities across the period from the later eighteenth century to the turn of the twentieth. This reconstruction of sequence gives an opportunity, not only to clarify the range and order of events, but to work towards two more explanation-focused tasks. That is, it gives an opportunity to place each moral reform initiative in precise context – to explain its appearance and evolving fortunes in terms of the context (demographic, economic, cultural, political, administrative) which moulded the perceptions and motives of those attracted to (or repelled by) the task taken up. It also gives a much-needed opportunity to integrate the study of particular causes – temperance, antislavery, social purity,

* M. I. Finley, quoted by David Brion Davis, ‘The Perils of Doing History by Ahistorical Abstraction’, in T. Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), p. 300.

etc. – into a study of moral reform as a diverse but distinctive mode of thought and action. ‘Very little has so far been published on Victorian moral reform movements. There is no general survey of them’: thus Brian Harrison in 1974.[†] Since then there has emerged a useful (though still incomplete) range of individual movement studies and sectoral surveys, yet it remains the case that there is still no general survey of them, let alone a survey which links them to their eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century precursors and prototypes. This book aims to provide that survey.

A second way of reading the book is to read it as a contribution to the cultural history of the strata of society from which moral reform associations drew their chief support – that is, the English middle classes, especially the professional and commercial middle classes. The leaders of moral reform movements over the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as I aim to explain, can plausibly be said to have established a ‘moral reform tradition’. By means of volunteer associational action they created and successfully transmitted across several generations a collective memory of cultural heritage and obligation, as well as a commitment to a form of public action self-consciously presented as aiming to transcend individual or sectional self-interest. That sense of obligation was particularly aroused by unease about the moral consequences of material advance.

While it has long since been recognised that the English middle classes of this period cannot adequately be ‘represented’ by an elite of industrial capitalists, the tracing of the diversity of types of middle-class cultural response to the coming of a market-organised society is still, as I understand it, very much work in progress. It is in this context that I present the study of moral reform voluntary association as a contribution to the appraisal of middle-class ambivalence towards the spread of a market-organised society. On the one hand, it can be argued, voluntary association plays a major role in a middle-class mission to promote the market-related values of self-control and self-reliance among other social groups. On the other hand, moral reform voluntary effort is also identifiable as a reaction to the ‘temptations’ of a free market in goods, services and labour; and the attitudes expressed by reformers are attitudes which register a recurrent and, in some quarters, acute, anxiety about the market’s apparent power to corrupt moral values at all social levels including their own, thus potentially ‘delegitimizing’ middle-class claims to public leadership. In this context moral reform voluntarism can be identified as a form of compensatory investment in cultural stabilisation on behalf of the class most self-consciously ‘implicated’.

[†] B. Harrison, ‘State Intervention and Moral Reform’, in P. Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England* (1974), p. 317.

Finally, because of its focus on voluntary association, the book may be read as a contribution to current debate about the nature and cultural underpinning of that elusive yet desirable state of social evolution – ‘civil society’. In civil society, as political scientists present it, citizens avoid the repression and inflexibility inherent in societies organised in more authoritarian or atomised ways, instead acting in self-initiated ways which (largely inadvertently, through experimental practice) create ‘social capital greas[ing] the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly’. They do this, the argument goes, by active participation in a public life of committed, yet tolerant, trusting and (perhaps) ‘rational-critical’ interaction which both trains them in negotiation and, at the same time, curbs the ‘unmediated’ power of the state and of market forces over their lives. While the concerns that have stimulated this debate about the generation of ‘social capital’ have been aroused by perceived trends over recent generations in western societies as a whole, it has been customary to invoke a benchmark state of society for comparison which is located, historically, in the period (and, to a degree, in the society) covered by this book. The opportunity therefore arises to test, so far as evidence permits, the plausibility of the model, and also to make some attempt to evaluate the contribution of ‘associations for altruistic purposes’ to the emergence of a functioning civil society in England.

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This book has been a long time in the making. In that time I have incurred many debts, to institutions and to people.

Among institutions, my thanks to the Australian Research Council (the former Australian Research Grants Committee) for supporting two short research trips from which the project emerged. My thanks also to my own university for study leave and research support. My particular thanks to the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh, to the Centre for British Studies, University of Adelaide, and above all to the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford, for electing me to visiting fellowships which allowed ordered research, discussion and writing to take place.

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Abbreviations

Organisations

BAPT	British Association for the Promotion of Temperance
BFTS	British and Foreign Temperance Society
CEPS	Church of England Purity Society
CETS	Church of England Temperance Society
CFS	Children's Friend Society
COS	Charity Organisation Society
LDOS	Lord's Day Observance Society
LFS	Labourers' Friend Society
LNA	Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts
MRU	Moral Reform Union
NAPSS	National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (Social Science Association)
NARCDA	National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NVA	National Vigilance Association
PDS	Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and for the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders (Prison Discipline Society)
[R]SPCA	[Royal] Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SDUK	Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge
SRM	Society for the Reformation of Manners
UKA	United Kingdom Alliance
VA	Vigilance Association for the Defence of Personal Rights (Personal Rights Association)
WVS	Workhouse Visiting Society
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Sources and publications

<i>BDEB</i>	<i>Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography</i> , ed. D. Lewis (2 vols., Oxford, 1995)
BL Add. MSS	British Library Additional Manuscripts
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950</i> , ed. F. M. L. Thompson (3 vols., Cambridge, 1990)
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
HC SC	Select Committee of the House of Commons
HL SC	Select Committee of the House of Lords
<i>PD</i>	<i>Hansard's Parliamentary Debates</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>[British] Parliamentary Papers</i>
WWM	Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments

Introduction

A history of moral change is, to a certain degree, a history of everything. This book is of more limited scope. It aims to explore the history of English moral reform – that is, of self-conscious, organised efforts by groups of concerned citizens to change moral values and to modify patterns of behaviour associated with them. It is argued that ‘moral reform’ as a category of social action was a particular preoccupation of the period between the Revolution Settlement of 1688–9 and the turn of the twentieth century and, more distinctly still, of the hundred years between the 1780s and the 1880s.

Moral reform identified

How is moral reform to be identified? It may help to begin with an attempt at definition by an actively engaged contemporary. In 1852 the *British Temperance Advocate* published an article: ‘What the Temperance Society is NOT’.¹ In this article the author compared the work of a temperance society with the work of four other types of volunteer action. A temperance society was ‘not a charitable institution’ – though it helped to teach ‘the true charity which restores to sound moral habits, to virtuous self-help and self-reliance’. Nor was it ‘an educational society’ or a ‘sanitary association’ – though its encouragement to self-management would assist members towards accumulation of the resources and will-power needed to raise their educational and environmental goals. Finally, it was not ‘a political union’ – though its members, by their self-control, proved themselves fit for recognition as citizens. In the context of its era a fifth distinction might have been added – a temperance society was not (yet) an organisation for religious evangelisation – though the majority of its members would have some link with a church or, more likely, a chapel.

Why, then, this anxiety to establish a distinct identity? Why was such a distinction valued? As this survey of voluntary action develops, a cluster of explanations will become apparent. The most significant link moral reform to, and distinguish it from, the activities of organised religious evangelisation, of

¹ *British Temperance Advocate* 29 (1852), pp. 103–4.

charitable relief-giving, of party politics and of public administration. Thus one of the reasons why moral reform and religious evangelisation remained distinguishable (if sometimes overlapping) activities during this period was that moral reform had the potential to avoid sectarian disputes about the type or extent of belief in a particular form of Christianity. Again, one of the reasons why moral reformers preferred to distinguish their mission as one of encouraging 'true charity' was that it distanced them from stereotypes of religion-based relief-giving which, in an age of political economy, were vulnerable to charges of encouraging habitual ('demoralising') dependency. The key reason why moral reformers invariably felt unease at becoming too closely associated with a political party or pressure group was the fear that this would run the risk of subordinating goals perceived as altruistic to goals perceived to be tied to sectional self-interest. And a major reason why moral reformers usually retained a strong commitment to voluntary status when they became associated with the development of schemes for the 'reclamation' of the young or undersocialised or the victims of cruelty and injustice was that it helped them to retain a living sense of personal responsibility for those they perceived as 'less fortunate' than themselves – a sense which most of them envisaged as difficult to preserve if the work was entrusted to professional or official agency.

If this was, broadly speaking, the rationale of moral reform, what of the objectives falling within its scope? Here, temperance gives us only one illustration of a complex and mutating range of concerns. Activists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attached the moral reform label from time to time to everything from repression of the profanation of the Sabbath to the encouragement of pure literature, from the suppression of the slave trade to the prevention of cruelty to animals and children. Temperance, charity organisation, prison reform, the abolition of capital punishment, reclamation of 'fallen women', promotion of 'social purity', all fell within the category for some or all of the period explored here.

In this they reflected changing practical priorities: the discovery of one form of moral depravity often led to the discovery of another. They also reflected changing perceptions of the moral sphere and its boundaries. That is, moral reform depended on a set of culturally evolving assumptions about the responsibility of individuals for their own actions – about their capacity to choose between vicious and virtuous conduct. Obviously a religious culture expressing its values in terms of sin and salvation will define this responsibility in terms distinct from the terms employed by secular utilitarians. A society which respects hierarchy and inherited rank will have a set of moral values which distinguishes it from one which promotes individual autonomy and freedom of contract. The extent of specialisation of professional knowledge will also have a bearing on expectations of moral responsibility, as will the degree to which a society endorses a specialisation of gender roles. All this makes a difference,

and unavoidably did make a difference to the goals which moral reformers set themselves over the period between the later eighteenth and later nineteenth centuries. During this period, as we shall be acknowledging, debate about moral values, about moral standards of behaviour, was therefore constantly entangled with debate about religious belief and organisation; philanthropy, education and the legitimate scope and goals of public administration; labour management, work discipline and public order; family structure, gender roles and the socialisation of the young. At core it became a debate about the cultural control of the 'animal appetites' – greed, lust, violence and (if it counts as an appetite) indolence – all human propensities which have the potential to disrupt the fulfilment of social obligation to family, employer, neighbours, civil authority and God.² In a phrase, the limits of the moral are culturally determined in complex ways.

Beyond the issue of identifying certain values and patterns of behaviour as objects of moral reform concern, of course, lies the further question of agency. Whose culture did the determining of moral boundaries, and by what mechanisms?³ Without attempting to foreclose too much future argument, the finding of this survey is that moral reform cultural elites can be most readily located among 'the middling ranks' of English society. Sometimes the influence of these elites was powerful or persuasive enough to recruit support from the world of the landed, titled and fashionable, and sometimes also from the world of the labouring classes, especially skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen. As noted above, the world of the middling ranks was not always (or even usually) a culturally homogeneous world, and part of the appeal of moral reform was its potential to build experimental bridges of co-operation across the chasms of regional, occupational, gender and religious difference.⁴ Yet, in one respect, it was united – united in commitment to a belief in the utility and acceptability of volunteer association as a means of mobilising support and taking public action. The tradition of clubs and societies in English life was by no means a new one.⁵ And the uses to which volunteer association might be put were equally

² Cf. William Paley's classification of moral duties ('Towards God . . . other men . . . ourselves'), *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785; reprinted 1978), p. 36.

³ For the useful distinction, relied on here, between 'culture as a category of social life' and 'culture as system and practice', see W. Sewell, 'The Concept(s) of Culture', in V. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley CA, 1999), pp. 39–47.

⁴ On the tensions within middle-class culture, see A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class? Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity since the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud, 1998), pp. xv–xxxii; S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 14–30.

⁵ The tradition, it must also be noted, was not confined to England. The existence of a culture of voluntary association, spread by the later eighteenth century across the English-speaking world, has recently been extensively documented (P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580–1800* (Oxford, 2000)), and the culture was periodically reinforced during the century which followed,

available for the pursuit of projects of unvarnished self-interest (regional, occupational, political) and for the promotion of projects of claimed communal altruism. The tradition of moral reform, as it emerged, however, was firmly based on a collective belief in the possibility – and desirability – of disinterested service in the cause of human moral improvement. Whether that improvement was envisaged as a ‘reformation’ towards the retrieval of a purer moral order allowed over modern times to decay, or as a ‘reform’ towards the creation of a more modern, more rational, refined and evolved set of cultural relationships, remained an ambiguity to be resolved over time.⁶

Perspectives on moral reform

Meanwhile, moral reform as it developed also became subject to evaluation by people other than its supporters. Not all of these were prepared to take moral reformers’ declarations of altruistic motive at face value and, as we shall see in chapters to follow, there were moments when sections of the moral reform project came under direct challenge. Such was the heat released that when, at the end of the nineteenth century, a first generation of professional historians began to record the achievements of moral reform activism, their attempts at evaluation were themselves coloured by awareness of its contested reputation. It is to these and following attempts at contextualisation of moral reform that we must now turn.

Broadly speaking, we can identify three approaches – three framing narratives – into which the English volunteer moral reform tradition has been inserted over the last hundred years. The first of these approaches is probably still the most widely recognised. This is the presentation of moral reform as an aspect of the history of the development of capitalist industrial society. In this approach, campaigners for moral reform make their appearance as either the knowing or involuntary articulators of the new standards of labour discipline required by that circumstance. The primary goal/function of moral reform, the argument goes, was to break in a ‘pre-industrial’ population to the ‘methodical way of life of industrial capitalism’. ‘The pressures towards discipline and order extended from the factory, on one hand, the Sunday school, on the other, into every aspect of life: leisure, personal relationships, speech, manners’, explains E. P. Thompson in his depiction of the era of ‘Pitt’s moral lieutenant, Wilberforce’.⁷

especially among groups (temperance, antislavery, child-protection associations, etc.) linked to Protestant evangelical networks. This study is limited to English materials, partly to make it manageable, partly because of the distinctive cultural shape of English associational voluntarism which stemmed from English society’s distinctive ecclesiastical and social structure, and from its political and public welfare systems.

⁶ Cf. J. Innes, ‘“Reform” in English Public Life: The Fortunes of a Word’, in A. Burns and J. Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform* (Cambridge, 2003).

⁷ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968 edn), pp. 442–3, though cf. Thompson’s warning against ‘sentimentalizing’ pre-industrial society at p. 451.

Thompson's critique of the coercive and disciplinary agenda of moral reform was, in fact, a mid-twentieth-century reworking of a long line of moral criticism of moral reform. Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, had identified 'economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind' as incurable agents of the exploiting classes 'desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society'.⁸ Before Marx, the defender of the leisure pastimes of the free-born Englishman, William Cobbett, had also identified moral reform as the prop of an exploitive social order: faced with the prospect of enforced departure to America in 1818, he had welcomed (rather prematurely) the opportunity of moving to 'a free country [with] No Wilberforces!'⁹

By the time self-consciously professional historians began to create the story of 'the English industrial revolution' in the early twentieth century the perspective had changed, though not the generally negative evaluation of moral reform. What had infuriated Cobbett and drawn the contempt of Marx now drew the puzzlement mixed with hindsight-assisted disapproval of the Webbs. Moral reform was recognised as a precursor of social reform and therefore acknowledged as a legitimate field of activity, but it was evaluated negatively for being a conceptualisation of issues which was both unscientific and pre-modern. As the Webbs summed up the moral reform activists of the 1780s, these were people unable to distinguish between class interest and wider community need:

There is, to our modern feelings, something unsavoury in this combination of concern for the spiritual welfare of the poor and for the security and profit of the rich, especially when it led merely to attempts to deprive the lower orders of their margin of leisure and opportunities for amusement.¹⁰

And because moralising volunteers were so unwilling to subordinate self-interest to scientific evaluation of outcomes, they had continued to play an ambivalent role in the development of a coherent, uniform, professionally administered and adequately resourced set of national social policies designed to achieve 'the prevention, not directly of pauperism but of destitution itself'.¹¹

⁸ Marx, in his commentary on 'Conservative, or Bourgeois Socialism', *Communist Manifesto*, ch. 3.

⁹ Cobbett's *Political Register*, 3 Oct. 1818, cited in J. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer, 1760–1832* (1917), p. 238.

¹⁰ S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, vol. xi: *The History of Liquor Licensing* (1963; 1st publ. 1903), p. 162. See also p. 159.

¹¹ Webb, *English Local Government*, vol. viii: *English Poor Law History, Part II: The Last Hundred Years* (1963; 1st publ. 1929), pp. 467–8; and see the ambivalent appraisal of the COS and its work, viii.455–6; ix.791. The Webbs, and many labour historians after them, it must be recognised, saw a continuing role for volunteer action, experiment and self-sacrifice, so long as it was subordinated to state-determined priorities and not applied to produce merely 'feel-good' outcomes.

As this approach makes clear, for the Webbs, as for many labour historians after them, the chief analytical failing of the moral reform approach was that it privileged motive over outcome. Moral reform was tolerable as a way of muddling through a transitional stage of social development, but an impediment to the achievement of citizen social integration and material well-being when it continued to value status-driven volunteer 'amateurism' in an age with the resources and knowledge to do better.¹² The future lay with the democratically legitimised, expert-advised, centrally organised state.

The Webbs, of course, had their own political axes to grind and it has been noted that a certain amount of their 'historical' work was in fact material originally drafted for purposes of political persuasion.¹³ That does not of itself, however, invalidate what they, and others in their tradition of interpretation, were arguing in the case of moral reform. Nor does it undermine the claim of a major segment of early twentieth-century educated opinion to be making a professional evaluation of the significance of past 'experiments' from the viewpoint of 'present knowledge' as it existed at the time of writing.¹⁴ If material well-being and social efficiency were the assumed ultimate objectives of society, then class-based volunteer initiative was bound to be both inefficient and oppressive in its impact. Voluntarists *were* wasting scarce resources. Moral reform voluntarists were inappropriate, insensitive and counter-productive sponsors of cultural change in a society based on a principle of equality in citizenship.

Yet, from the hindsight view of a later generation, two major blind spots limit the persuasiveness of the 'labour discipline' approach to moral reform. The first is its limited range of curiosity about moral reform goals: these goals were assumed to be the thinly disguised expressions of material class interest and, if they resisted this classification (as antislavery appeared to some to do), then they became examples of selective conscience or even of 'false consciousness'.¹⁵

The other question which a labour discipline approach tended to sidestep was the question of who represented the exploiting classes in moral reform movements – the question of distribution of power *within* property-owning ranks. Once again, it was Evangelicals such as Wilberforce ('Pitt's moral lieutenant') who posed the most obvious problem, both because of their strangely yoked

¹² Webb, *English Local Government*, viii.456, 467–8.

¹³ A. Kidd, 'Historians or Polemicists? How the Webbs Wrote their History of the English Poor Laws', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 40 (1987), pp. 400–17, esp. 410–15. See also D. Cannadine, 'The Past and the Present in the English Industrial Revolution 1880–1980', *Past and Present*, no. 102 (1984), pp. 114–31, esp. 132–42.

¹⁴ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain 1830–1990* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 155–60; M. Wiener, 'The Unloved State: Twentieth-Century Politics in the Writing of Nineteenth-Century History', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), pp. 288–9.

¹⁵ For the Hammonds' puzzled acknowledgement of Wilberforce's limited but genuine 'humanity', see *Town Labourer*, p. 245. For the classic argument that antislavery was a form of capitalist self-interest, embraced when it was realised that 'free labour' was more profitable than slave labour, see E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill NC, 1944).

priorities and because of their willingness on occasion to criticise vested interests and to alienate 'official opinion'. Yet, at various stages of the narrative of modernisation, the same could also be said of *secular* moral reformers – administrative and professional elites in particular. Why, in addition, were captains of industry so modestly represented in moral reform leadership? Eventually, a revaluation of the relation between (and relative importance of) economic structure and cultural superstructure would emerge to encourage labour historians to take culture as a variable in its own right,¹⁶ but by that stage the emergence of the working classes was not the only narrative of interest to historians of culture change.

A second framing narrative with implications for the history of moral reform movements has been one starting from the assumption that what most needs explaining in modern national experience is not the history of conflict, but of conflict successfully mediated or resolved. Once again, there is a sense in which this narrative is a recycling of the world-view of a section of Victorian society itself – the personal responsibility-taking, respectability-seeking section of that society – and it is therefore no surprise to find the classic presentation of this viewpoint in a work retrieving for a mid-twentieth-century audience the world of nineteenth-century temperance. This is Brian Harrison's study of *Drink and the Victorians*, first published in 1971. The cultural underpinning of that concern with the evolution of stability and consensus, however, spread further than an attempt by a new generation of professional historians to demonstrate their technical skill by the interpretation of the fossilised remains of extinct cultural species.¹⁷

One context prompting revaluation was the increasingly anomalous national experience of English society itself by mid-twentieth-century standards of comparison. By rights, the 'first industrial nation' should have led the way in resolving its class conflicts in favour of the working classes. Yet the historical record seemed, instead, to indicate a remarkable story of class politics deflected.¹⁸ In addition, the prestige of state-sponsored solutions to issues of class exploitation had, by the 1960s, sunk; the reputation of the 'Fabian orthodoxy' as developed by the Webbs and others had been damaged by exposure to the realities of state totalitarianism of both radical right (by then defeated) and Soviet communist left (still 'flourishing').¹⁹ In its place a new post-war generation of young

¹⁶ H. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians* (Oxford, 1984), chs. 6–7, esp. pp. 234ff.

¹⁷ B. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815–1872* (1971), based on his Oxford D.Phil. thesis of 1966.

¹⁸ Once again, there were precedents for this insight, most notably Elie Halévy's thesis on the role of Methodism as a cultural bridge set out in his *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century* (6 vols., 1949 edn), vol. i: *England in 1815* (first publ. 1913), pp. 424–5. (My thanks to John Walsh for a timely reminder about the relevance of Halévy to the historiography of the subject.)

¹⁹ Wiener, 'The Unloved State', pp. 295–7.

historians was moving, sometimes rebelliously, to identify not with the managers and policy elites of societies past and present, but with 'ordinary people' as the shapers of their own cultural worlds.²⁰

One logical outcome of this broadening of interest from state to society, and from labour relations to culture, was a new-found interest in voluntary association generally. It became relevant to study the ways in which 'community' was formed on bases of religious, geographical, ethnic, age-group and gender loyalty as well as of class. It became relevant as well to investigate cultures of consumption in their own right rather than as facets of the problem of labour discipline. As mentioned above, the pioneering case study of this approach was Brian Harrison's *Drink and the Victorians*. Harrison was soon to use this case study as a strand in studies of 'moral reform' voluntarism as a general phenomenon of public life in 'post-industrial revolution' Britain.²¹

Harrison drew several deductions from his studies of moral reform efforts. First, moral reform motive could not be reduced to economic self-interest alone. Some of it clearly was so reducible, but much of it (including the impulse to control alcohol consumption) was a response to a variety of pressures, cultural and psychological as well as economic (some of which could be seen to have outlasted the industrial phase of capitalist society itself). Thus, while some labouring people sometimes opposed moral reform as a form of class oppression, others actively co-operated with the propertied classes through voluntary movements such as temperance and antislavery, even Sunday observance. Such 'working-class co-operation', while it clearly aided 'long-term [cross-class] co-operation', was not usefully interpreted 'as an example of "false-consciousness"' – rather as 'an important stage in the *growth* of working-class consciousness' as it fostered both organisational self-help and 'articulateness'.²²

The problem, therefore, for Harrison, as he ultimately formulated it, merged into an aspect of a general quest for 'the sources of social and political cohesion in Britain since the industrial revolution', and Marx's denigration of moral reform movements as vehicles of class manipulation became a function of his own 'peculiar perspective': '[Marx] rightly saw that they were blurring class divisions; but because he foresaw an era of mounting class conflict, he underestimated their historical significance.'²³ Their fully restored historical significance was that they assisted the establishment of a pattern of integration

²⁰ Kaye, *British Marxist Historians*, p. 205. See also Harrison, *Drink* (2nd edn, Keele University, Staffs., 1994), p. 13. All references to *Drink and the Victorians* are to the second edition unless otherwise noted.

²¹ B. Harrison, 'State Intervention and Moral Reform', pp. 289–322; B. Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom. Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 4–5.

²² Harrison, *Drink* (1st edn), p. 367. See also B. Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, no. 38 (1967), pp. 119–23.

²³ Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation', p. 121.

of outsiders into a tradition of public debate about values which was accepted as normal and serviced by 'political mechanisms [to] bring the idealist into regular contact with the pragmatist'.²⁴ 'Nonconformists, women and articulate working men' in turn challenged the status quo to educate and be educated in turn about the practicalities of power. The outcome was a 'Peaceable Kingdom' of citizens with the 'highly original quality . . . of *not killing one another*'.²⁵

If this was a class struggle minimising revaluation of moral reform, an alternative line of revaluation developed in parallel over the period aimed to solve the puzzle of 'stability achieved' not so much by investigation of relations *between* classes as by exploration of the power relations between status and occupational groups *within* the morality-sponsoring middle class itself. Once again, the starting point was a recognition that class loyalty was more complicated, more culturally conditioned, than attribution based on economic self-interest alone could explain.

A series of case studies of the dynamics of middle-class interaction in the archetypal commercial centres of the north of England (and of Scotland) during the formative decades of the industrial age gave strong clues. Most fully developed among these studies was that of R. J. Morris on Leeds.²⁶ The Leeds middle class of the 1830s and 40s, by occupational criteria and by patterns of religious and political behaviour, Morris noted, was far from the monolith of economic self-interest steadfastly pursued which orthodox Marxists might hope to find. Indeed, virtually the only area in which class co-operation of any reliably predictable sort could be located was that of voluntary association. Voluntary societies, Morris argued, gave urban elites faced with the challenge of establishing their authority in an era of dislocation a way forward. It was a way forward which avoided reliance on the state (which they distrusted as deficient in moral legitimacy). It was a way forward which allowed community-based co-operation to take place between citizens of otherwise antagonistic religious allegiance. It was also a move which sidestepped the immediate need to resolve cultural tensions within propertied ranks about the relationship between the laws of the market and the laws of God. In this

²⁴ Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 6.

²⁵ Harrison, *Drink* (1st edn), p. 363; G. Orwell, epigraph to Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*.

²⁶ R. J. Morris, 'Organization and Aims of the Principal Secular Voluntary Organizations of the Leeds Middle Class, 1830–1851' (Oxford D.Phil., 1970), thereafter reworked into a range of chapters and articles culminating in *Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820–1850* (Manchester, 1990). Other major studies sensitive to the role of culturally based status assertion in middle-class self-presentation include T. Koditschek, *Class Formation in Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1990), chs. 8–9; A. Kidd, 'The Middle Class in 19th-Century Manchester', in A. Kidd and K. Roberts (eds.), *City, Class and Culture* (Manchester, 1985); S. Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the Urban Middle Class and the "Dominance" of Manufacturers in 19th-Century Britain', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 44 (1991), pp. 66–85.

way voluntary societies (often presented as having a moral reform purpose) became the early nineteenth-century ‘basis for the formation of a middle-class identity’.²⁷

As this line of argument indicates, Morris retained some of the labour history tradition of interpretation of moral reform as a project of class self-interest. The term ‘class’, however, is a much more culture-linked one than it once was, and the term ‘self-interest’ now embraces fully self-conscious class awareness of the need to preserve moral legitimacy. Volunteer subscriber-based association thus gives the key to explaining the successful stabilisation of early urban industrial society. And the documented dominance of commercial and professional men in voluntary associations gives the clue to urban middle-class priorities – not profit maximisation but ‘a stable and moral order’ in which ‘market structures’ are ‘manipulated’ to legitimise middle-class claims to civic leadership.²⁸ In this sense, the middle class becomes an ‘elite-led class’, with the elite proving its credentials by its energy and skill in hierarchical but community-based voluntary activity.²⁹

These ‘stability-explaining’ approaches to moral reform certainly refine the ‘labour discipline’ interpretation. They also help to resolve issues which that interpretation was inclined to ignore or to present as paradox. From one direction they make sense of the *range* of moral reform enthusiasms – not just the enthusiasms focused on labour discipline but the ‘consumption-disciplining’ and ‘citizen-training’ ones as well. From another direction, they are able to give a plausible explanation for the dominance of cultural rather than economic elites in moral reform mobilisation.

These are major insights, both of them persuasive as far as they are developed. They do, of course, rest on their own assumptions – as all arguments must – and in this case the assumptions include a willingness to believe that, in English public life, cultural conflict has proved an educative experience because conflict has, broadly speaking, been a stage in a process of negotiated compromise.³⁰ As we shall see, not all observers of moral reform in its more coercive phases have been able to agree with this, and some would argue that the ghost of a

²⁷ R. J. Morris, ‘Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780–1850: An Analysis’, *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), p. 96, and see also pp. 109–13. Again, there are nineteenth-century precedents for this line of interpretation: see, e.g., Robert Vaughan, *The Age of Great Cities* (1843), pp. 296–7, cited in A. Lees, *Cities Perceived* (Manchester, 1985), p. 47.

²⁸ For the fullest statement of the case, see Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, ch. 13, esp. pp. 327–8 (from which the above quotations are taken).

²⁹ Morris deliberately particularised his conclusions to provincial urban communities of the early nineteenth century, but has recurrently noted their applicability at a national level, with formative ‘after-effects’ extending across the century: for his most recent statement, see ‘Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns’, in M. Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. iii: *1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 395–426, esp. pp. 415–23.

³⁰ See, e.g., Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 430–3; B. Harrison, *The Transformation of British Politics 1860–1995* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 162–3, 169–70.

Cromwellian seventeenth-century ‘rule of the saints’ took longer to exorcise than might have been hoped.

A further potential line of questioning of the stability-explaining perspective on moral reform lies in its appraisal of the culture of capitalism itself. While the perspective acknowledges, more than labour historians did, the willingness of market capitalist ‘community leaders’ to recognise that enlightened self-interest required the moralisation of the market, it does assume that the marketplace itself is an inherently interest-driven institution. It fell to a transatlantic historian, Thomas L. Haskell, to suggest in 1985 the unsettling possibility that the market might, under some circumstances, actually generate a sense of moral duty subversive of self-interest. Haskell’s argument was that the market, by its reliance on ever-extending networks of contractual promise-keeping, ‘expanded the range of causal perception’, thus helping to encourage ‘in some people strong feelings of guilt and anger about suffering that had previously aroused no more than passive sympathy’. In this way habits of thinking developed by commercial capitalism might sometimes help to bring about ‘a shift in the conventions of moral responsibility’.³¹ His attempts to apply his market-based model of the emergence of a ‘humanitarian sensibility’ to the case of the antislavery movement failed to convince historians already eminent in the field. (One bluntly restated the widely accepted counter-hypothesis – that market capitalism, by lengthening the chain of causal connection, may have ‘a paralyzing effect’ on perception of moral responsibility.³²) Nonetheless, the argument that the culture of market capitalism might itself contribute to the redefinition of moral values remained an intriguing, if unverified, possibility.³³

Meanwhile, by the end of the 1980s the preconditions were already in place for another narrative scene shift – a shift with implications for the evaluation of projects of moral reform. Briefly contrasted, if the previous narratives had been stories, first, of class conflict and, second, of national cultural integration, then the third was the story of the emergence of ‘civil society’. As with the first two narratives, the third also had its own pre-history.

The history of the narrative of the emergence of civil society is one which extends back at least to the time of the European Enlightenment. The narrative

³¹ Thomas L. Haskell, ‘Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility’, *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), pp. 339–61, 547–66, at p. 556; also ‘Convention and Hegemonic Interest in the Debate over Antislavery’, in T. Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate* (Berkeley CA, 1992), pp. 200–59 at p. 237. For a further exploration of the class implications of the rhetoric of ‘sympathy’, see R. McGowen, ‘A Powerful Sympathy: Terror, the Prison, and Humanitarian Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), pp. 312–34.

³² David Brion Davis, ‘The Perils of Doing History by Ahistorical Abstraction’, in Bender, *The Antislavery Debate*, pp. 290–309 at p. 308; John Ashworth, ‘The Relationship between Capitalism and Humanitarianism’, in *ibid.*, pp. 180–99 at p. 187.

³³ Cf. F. Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption* (New York, 1999), ch. 15; G. Cross, *An All-Consuming Century* (New York, 2000), ch. 1.

had appealed to eighteenth-century social theorists of a rationalist, secularist outlook because it indicated the possibility of developing a society of citizens free to mount a critical challenge to the sacred or prescription-based authority of Church and state in a manner sufficiently disciplined to ensure 'creative' competition and improvement rather than disorder and destruction.³⁴ The appeal of this reason-based narrative had been overlaid in the nation-building, state-empowering later nineteenth century. It was also vulnerable to attack by early and mid-twentieth-century Marxist theorists as incurably bourgeois in preoccupation. It nevertheless had a way of reviving in periods of perceived state abuse of power. In the aftermath of the totalitarian excesses of Nazism, for example, and in the face of continuing fascination with state socialism, venerable liberals with the memory of a more self-reliant age argued with some vehemence for voluntary activity to be given due recognition. Society, they argued, needed 'dynamic individuals with consciences' as a necessary check against future state abuse of its power over citizens and as a guarantee of continuing 'social advance'. (These critics included, most notably, Lord Beveridge, father of the welfare state.³⁵)

It was, however, the experience of the apparent *failure* of state-sponsored projects of material progress, rather than their triumph, which nudged professional historians towards a revived interest in the concept of civil society during the 1980s and 90s. On the domestic front, the market-liberating public policy enthusiasms of the Thatcher years coincided neatly with intensified historical doubts about the claim of an urban industrial bourgeoisie ever to have scaled the commanding cultural heights of nineteenth-century English society.³⁶ The decisive shift in the direction of a 'post-industrial', services-focused economy over the same period also helped to make plausible a reinterpretation of a once-labelled 'pre-industrial' eighteenth-century English society as less 'undeveloped', more recognisably 'commercial' than previous master narratives had allowed.³⁷

On the European and international front, it was the 1989–91 collapse of Soviet communism as a working model of modernisation which sharpened curiosity about 'private' forms of association, both as clues to the failure of 'totalising' regimes and as promising agencies of social renewal in post-communist public

³⁴ J. Keane, *Civil Society and the State* (1988), 'Introduction', esp. p. 22. See also J. Ehrenberg, *Civil Society. The Critical History of an Idea* (New York, 1999), ch. 4.

³⁵ Lord Beveridge, *Voluntary Action* (1948), esp. pp. 10, 318, 324. For the precise context of Beveridge's outburst, see M. Smerdon, 'William Beveridge and Social Advance', in *Building Civil Society* (West Malling, Kent, 1998), pp. 14–17.

³⁶ M. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

³⁷ P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 1–7; J. Innes, 'Jonathan Clark, Social History and England's "Ancien Regime"', *Past and Present*, no. 115 (1987), pp. 165–200 at 178–9.

life. In the aftermath of both adjustments of perspective came a curiosity to identify the preconditions for the emergence and consolidation of 'social trust'; and one way of measuring or tracing the formation of social trust was to look to the history of voluntary association, especially 'altruistic' or 'rational-critical' forms of association. The most influential creator of a conceptual backdrop for this search has undoubtedly been Jürgen Habermas. And the book in which he made most explicit the historical dimension of his conceptual preoccupation with the preconditions for the emergence of rational-critical decision-making was *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (first published in German in 1962). (An English translation followed in 1989.)

The narrative shape of this work is, unlike that of the narratives so far discussed, one of rise and fall rather than of deferred but ultimately natural rise and resolution. That is, Habermas argues for the emergence of a public sphere of 'rational-critical debate' but also for its eclipse.³⁸ A public sphere emerged in western Europe, Habermas argues, at the end of the seventeenth century as the demands of Church, state and kin group for unreflective obedience were eroded by political acceptance of religious pluralism, by market-generated demand for reliable information and for security of property, and by unsupervised associations for recreation and cultural exchange. In this 'public sphere constituted by private people', he suggests, prescriptive authority was brought steadily to account among a society of intellectual equals who exchanged and evaluated ideas purely on the basis of their wisdom, coherence and efficacy.³⁹ This creative state of equilibrium between state, market and private citizens which resulted, it is argued, survived, and consolidated itself in varying national patterns until the closing decades of the nineteenth century. At that point it was subverted into a 'refeudalization' of coerced or contrived public obedience, the fall being precipitated by the increase in power of government and of monopoly forms of economic organisation (including the popular press). The result was the marginalisation of independent citizen association, the commodification of public discourse, and the decline of a public sphere of rational-critical debate.⁴⁰

The attraction of this approach for present-generation English-speaking historians – the present writer among them – has been two-fold. At the story-telling level, the Habermas approach opened a plausible route for integrating English history into a 'European' story of modernisation, or at least of testing

³⁸ More precisely, he argues in this way in the original (1962) version of his case. He has since confessed that 'if today I made another attempt to analyze the structural transformation of the public sphere', the 'outcome for a theory of democracy . . . could give cause for a less pessimistic assessment': J. Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge MA, 1992), p. 457.

³⁹ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge MA, 1989), p. 30, and ch. III, esp. pp. 57–64.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. V, esp. pp. 175–9.

the empirical validity of a challenging hypothesis.⁴¹ But the major attraction has been conceptual. Habermas had first published his book in the context of 1960s critique of post-war consumer capitalism in West Germany. (His subtitle – *An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* – had made the link to neo-Marxist class analysis explicit.) By the time that English-speaking historians of the late 1980s began to take an active interest in the concept of the public sphere, bourgeois society seemed so obviously in the ascendant as to allow the discarding of much of the neo-Marxist scaffolding which had been assumed to surround the concept when first presented.⁴² The appeal of the concept of a public sphere for these historians lay in the way in which it allowed them to reconcile the history of institutions and the material world with the history of mentalities, ways of thinking, ‘discourse’. In the public sphere thoughts and sentiments were transformed into blueprints for practical action. In this way cultural values could plausibly be linked to the explanation of behavioural change.⁴³

Moral reform, altruism and the public sphere

As will be apparent by this point, my own approach to moral reform is not a rejection of previous approaches, but an attempt to refine, where possible synthesise, and further develop them. I accept that moral reform, as an interconnecting set of networks, was a class-conditioned phenomenon. My conception of class extends beyond the economic to include cultural identity, and it will become clear that I regard cultural systems (such as legal practices, systems of religious ritual and belief, traditions of volunteer association, habitual patterns of mental association and moral vocabulary) as independent variables capable of shaping ‘moral discourse’. That is, I adopt an approach which effectively accepts the dismantling of the ‘labour history’ model of economic ‘base’ determining cultural ‘superstructure’. Yet I am equally concerned not to lose sight of the economic dimension of moral reform. That dimension I take to include consumption patterns and market distribution systems, as well as the better-known variables of technology change and of labour discipline.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See, e.g., R. Price, *British Society, 1680–1880* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 192–3; S. Gunn, ‘The Public Sphere, Modernity and Consumption: New Perspectives on the History of the English Middle Class’, in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism. Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800–1940* (Manchester, 1999), ch. 2, esp. pp. 13–17.

⁴² For identification of the original context of composition, see Habermas ‘Further Reflections’, p. 438. For the English translation of 1989 and its reception, including the residual unease of some about the apparent devaluation of working-class historical agency, see Calhoun, *Habermas*, esp. Calhoun’s ‘Introduction’, pp. 38–9.

⁴³ Cf. J. Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 10.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kidd and Nicholls, *Making of the British Middle Class?*, pp. xxi–xxiii, for a more extended elaboration of the benefits of a similar approach.

The key framework within which debate about moral values is analysed in this book is the ‘bourgeois public sphere’, as outlined in the discussion above. As is widely acknowledged, this model of European modernisation is not without its ambiguities, and it will be part of the task to seek to clarify them. In particular, the Habermas presentation of the bourgeois public sphere as a forum of ‘rational-critical debate’ – a forum open to all on the sole criterion of their powers of intellectual persuasion – has been questioned on grounds both of unequal cultural access, and of ambivalence about the role played by collective emotion in cultural mobilisations.⁴⁵ The potential rewards of adopting the approach, however, remain great. As I noted in my preface, it is one thing to define a new level of moral sensitivity, quite another to find a way of making the message resonate across a wider society. In attempting to explain how individual disposition became transformed into practical collective action, I have found the public sphere to be a useful concept of linkage. And in attempting to explain why some moral reform movements flourished while others struggled or wilted I have found the question ‘Who needed to be convinced, and by what methods of persuasion?’ a key to many otherwise perplexing situations.

The agenda which emerges from this approach to the subject develops as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to a key moment of commitment to moral reform by volunteer associational methods – the mid-1780s – before moving back over the century to explore precedents for action and then laterally across late eighteenth-century society to identify the triggers of late-century concern and the resonance achieved by reform leaders among those they identified as the audience necessary to convince.

Chapter 2 records the shaping effects produced on moral reform enthusiasms by the onset of a generation of war and national emergency. While the urge to purge God’s chosen people of moral defect spread, the enthusiasm of political and ecclesiastical elites for unrestrained volunteer association visibly contracted as doubts about loyalty to existing authority arose. Nonetheless, these were years of considerable success for pan-evangelical experiment in national volunteer organisation and, as chapter 3 relates, the post-Waterloo generation experienced both an expansion and a differentiation of specialisms among moral reform campaigns. These campaigns engaged both proponents and critics of a new market-organised social order and reached a climax with the successful (but in some ways atypical and unsustainable) campaign to abolish slavery within the British empire in 1833.

⁴⁵ G. Eley, ‘Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures’, in Calhoun, *Habermas*, pp. 303–6, 325–31; F. Trentmann, ‘Introduction’, in F. Trentmann (ed.), *Paradoxes of Civil Society* (New York, 2000), pp. 24–8. See also, for warnings against too literal a reading of Habermas’s ‘Öffentlichkeit’ as a spatially defined ‘public sphere’, H. Mah, ‘Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians’, *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), pp. 153–82, esp. pp. 156–68.

Chapter 4 explores the difficulties which moral reform as a project encountered in the early Victorian years. The extension of electoral politics after 1832, the growth of certain forms of professional knowledge, and the entrenchment of a discourse of gender difference all posed problems of adaptation to a new 'acoustic' of public debate. In spite of successful cross-class expansion of its support base, it will be demonstrated, moral reform in this era was often hard pressed to retain a sense of distinct identity. This made its claims to altruistic public action notably vulnerable to criticism.

From mid-century onwards, however, moral reform can be seen to have gained a renewed vitality, both in range of goals and in diversity of supporters. The mid-Victorian phase of activity explored in chapter 5 thus chronicles something of a golden age of 'active citizenship'. In the still restricted but constantly expanding public sphere of the period between the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts moral reform proved a fruitful way for aspiring citizens to demonstrate the sincerity of their commitment and for existing elites to professionalise their sense of community responsibility. How far this tradition of 'competitive associational altruism' was able to survive and adapt in a new late Victorian age of democratising politics, bureaucratising public administration and corporatising business organisation forms the subject of chapter 6. Some time between the 1885 'maiden tribute of modern Babylon' agitation – last and most passionate of nineteenth-century moral reform crusades – and the coming of war in 1914, it is suggested, a distinctive way of discussing public issues in terms of moral reform was displaced – displaced by other cultural discourses of greater resonance.

1 Moral reform in the 1780s: the making of an agenda

William Wilberforce, 28 October 1787

‘God Almighty has set before me two great objects; the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.’ So confided the recently converted Member of Parliament for Yorkshire, William Wilberforce, in a diary entry set down on 28 October 1787.¹ The first of his objectives, being determinate, and having entered the realm of historical ‘fact’, has attracted the attention of historians without undue effort. The second object, being indeterminate, indeed indefinable except in culturally relative terms, has attracted less sustained and certainly less sympathetic attention. Yet Wilberforce spoke for a wide cross-section of his contemporaries in drawing attention to the depravity of the age in matters of morals and manners, and he touched a nerve which could be activated in sections of English society far beyond the limits of the doctrinally committed. This becomes clear when one looks to his correspondence and the evidence of those with whom he came into contact.

Wilberforce had started at the top. Already, in the spring of 1787, he had successfully played on the susceptibilities of the archbishop of Canterbury and of Queen Charlotte in order to induce the King in Privy Council to consent to a royal proclamation against vice and immorality. This proclamation was issued on 1 June and duly forwarded by the Secretary of State to county authorities.² Its contents combined a general denunciation of moral decay with a particular call for the enforcement of existing laws against drunkenness, gaming and profane, licentious or disorderly behaviour.

This first step achieved, Wilberforce had turned to the nobility. A week after the proclamation was issued, Lord Ailesbury came across him at the London house of the duke of Montagu, ‘asking [the duke] to be president of a society for carrying into execution the proclamation of last Saturday’s Gazette’. The following week Lord Ailesbury himself was signed up for the cause.³ The

¹ R. I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (5 vols., 1838), i, 149.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 132–3. The proclamation is reprinted in L. Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law* (5 vols., 1948–86), ii, 488–91.

³ *Historical Manuscripts Commission: Fifteenth Report*, Appendix, part VII (Ailesbury MSS) (1898), p. 286.

summer months were spent lobbying the bishops of the Established Church and other ‘men of the first Credit, and Influence’ and, by early 1788, nineteen of the twenty-six English bishops had endorsed the campaign. These included predictably pro-Evangelical figures such as the bishops of Salisbury (Shute Barrington) and of Chester (Porteus, translated to London in November 1787), but they also included some hostile or indifferent to evangelical religion – men such as Pretyman, bishop of Lincoln and chief ecclesiastical adviser to the Prime Minister. A similarly hopeful start was made among the aristocracy, five dukes and eleven other men of title being recruited, among them the most prominent Evangelical of rank, Lord Dartmouth; the reformed rake, the duke of Grafton; and the ex-Prime Minister, Lord North. Further head-hunted recruits included prominent county MPs, courtiers, civil servants and crown law officers.⁴

Yet these public figures, while potentially influential in the cause, were not the earliest to promote it, nor likely to be the most active on its behalf. (Earl Fitzwilliam, Wilberforce’s leading Yorkshire political opponent, uncharitably doubted that either the King or the ministry had ‘given the subject one quarter of an hour’s serious consideration’.⁵) The fact was that, in June 1787, Wilberforce was associating himself with a campaign which had already set down strong provincial and metropolitan grass-roots among property-owners of solid but lesser rank, a campaign which had shown itself capable of cutting across existing lines of religious, political and geographical cleavage. The earliest publicised efforts to meet the perceived moral crisis of the times by concerted voluntary effort had appeared in Yorkshire in the early and mid-1780s.⁶ Yorkshire was, especially after his return for the county in 1784, Wilberforce’s home territory but the activists who led the way there were, as we shall see, as likely as not to be non-Evangelicals and his political opponents. It was a diverse group of West Riding justices of the peace who in April 1787, meeting at Pontefract, had seized the initiative by resolving:

That without the general assistance of well-disposed persons, it doth not seem probable that the laws can be carried into such full effect, as to introduce any great reform in the manners of the people, or prevent those criminal excesses which are known every where to exist.⁷

⁴ Wilberforce, *Life*, i.393–4; Duke of Manchester to Wilberforce, 18 Sept. 1787, William Wilberforce papers, Duke University, Durham NC; Porteus MSS, vol. 2099, fos. 163–4, Lambeth Palace Library, London. (I owe this latter reference to Joanna Innes.)

⁵ Earl Fitzwilliam to Revd H. Zouch, 22 Sept. 1787, Sheffield Archives, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments [WWM], E234/16.

⁶ H. Zouch, *Hints respecting the Public Police* (1786), pp. 4, 20–3; J. Innes, ‘Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later 18th-Century England’, in E. Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture. England and Germany in the Late 18th Century* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 68–9.

⁷ [S. Glasse], *A Narrative of Proceedings Tending Towards a National Reformation, Previous to and Consequent Upon, His Majesty’s Royal Proclamation for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality* (1787), p. 20; Innes, ‘Politics and Morals’, pp. 69–70.

In the same month the grand jury of the City of London drew the attention of the City authorities to the spread of vice and crime. In the following month the grand jury of the County of Middlesex concurred in deploring ‘that general spirit of Dissipation and Extravagance, which so particularly distinguishes the present Times’, and called on the magistrates to take action.⁸ As samples of eighteenth-century ‘public opinion’, comments from such sources could not lightly be dismissed. (Wilberforce was later to cite with approval the maxim of Charles James Fox, that ‘Yorkshire and Middlesex between them make all England’.⁹) And, indeed, the resolutions of the West Riding justices were making their mark before the official proclamation of June helped to spread and magnify their effect. In the autumn of 1787 quarter-sessions magistrates of at least sixteen counties discussed methods of implementing the proclamation and the proclamation itself was read and publicised in parish churches all over England.¹⁰ In both Yorkshire and metropolitan London signs appeared that parish officials were moving to prime ‘respectable inhabitants’ for yet further combined action.¹¹

Wilberforce, we deduce, had, in the latter part of 1787, manoeuvred himself and his well-placed allies into a position from which they might hope to encourage and co-ordinate the growth of a national movement towards moral reformation. But they did not create the impulse behind it, nor did they define the objects on which the movement’s efforts were to be focused or the associational forms on which it relied for its effective existence. Why had the reformation of morals and manners become a nationwide issue by the mid-1780s? On what basis of collective experience and memory did the reform enthusiasts of the 1780s build?

Precedents

There was indeed a tradition of citizen moral mobilisation in English culture by the time Wilberforce came to claim it for his own blend of purposes in 1787. True, it was a discontinuous tradition, and one with cultural associations of doubtful appeal to many among the polite and propertied ranks of later eighteenth-century society. It existed, nonetheless, and had left its own record for the instruction of those seeking national information later in the century. This record was stored in the reports and contemporary histories of the

⁸ Glasse, *Narrative*, pp. 24–5. ⁹ Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.133.

¹⁰ Innes, ‘Politics and Morals’, pp. 77–8, esp. n. 50–1.

¹¹ West Riding Quarter Sessions order book 1786–90, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield, QS10/31, fos. 99, 147; Middlesex Quarter Sessions general order book 1784–9, London Metropolitan Archives, MJ/OC/11, fos. 349–53.

late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Societies for the Reformation of Manners.¹²

Societies for the Reformation of Manners (SRMs) had sprung up in London in the period immediately following the Glorious Revolution of 1688–9, thereafter spreading across a swathe of the towns and cities of (chiefly) southern and midlands England in the course of the 1690s. The immediate reasons for their formation were clearly tied to the priorities of the particular historical moment, though these priorities had some potential for application in other times of comparable anxiety. The trigger of alarm in this first, precedent-setting case had been set by the desperately ‘providential deliverance’ of Protestant England from popery by William of Orange in 1688, and by the lingering belief of an Old Testament-conditioned religious culture that the Almighty would not hesitate to afflict his chosen people once more if they failed collectively to live up to divine expectation of faithfulness to His declared will.¹³ Yet, given that 1688–9 also marked a formally declared rejection of attempts to impose centrally directed uniformity on free-born English people, how was the required cultural discipline to be enforced? The authority of Church courts over lay morals had been irreversibly weakened by the concession of religious toleration in 1689. There seemed little likelihood of secular authority stepping in to take up the strain: indeed, the parliament-approved decision to allow the lapse of the Licensing Act over print publications in 1695 suggested the reverse.¹⁴ The enforcement of such laws as were available to restrain profane and licentious behaviour was, it seemed, to be left to the responsibility of the conscientious volunteer. And it was in metropolitan London that volunteers were most likely to combine in action: it was in London that the impact of inflows of migrant labour and of crime, disorder and labour-market dislocation generated by the continuing military effort against Catholic France combined to suggest most vividly that respect for authority was under general challenge.¹⁵

The SRMs which emerged to meet this crisis found their sources of volunteer support at two distinct social levels. There was in the 1690s (as in the 1780s), enthusiasm to be tapped among an elite of public officials – men with their

¹² Wilberforce placed particular reliance on Josiah Woodward, *Account of the Rise and Progress of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners* (first published 1698): Wilberforce, *Life*, i.131. See also the diary of Bishop Porteus, 5 Aug. 1787, Porteus MSS, vol. 2099, fo. 160.

¹³ D. Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (New Haven CT, 1957), pp. 10–11; J. Spurr, ‘The Church, the Societies and the Moral Revolution of 1688’, in J. Walsh *et al.* (eds.), *The Church of England c. 1689–c. 1833* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 129–30.

¹⁴ On the impact of the Toleration Act, see T. Isaacs, ‘The Anglican Hierarchy and the Reformation of Manners’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 33 (1982), p. 395, but cf. J. Walsh and S. Taylor, ‘Introduction’, in Walsh *et al.*, *Church of England*, pp. 5–6, 16–18. On the lapse of the Licensing Act, see D. Hayton, ‘Moral Reform and Country Politics in the Late 17th-Century House of Commons’, *Past and Present*, no. 128 (1990), pp. 48–91, esp. p. 54.

¹⁵ R. Shoemaker, ‘Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London, 1690–1738’, in L. Davison *et al.* (eds.), *Stilling the Grumbling Hive. The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England 1689–1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 99–120, esp. 99–110.

own, potentially national networks of co-operation – and there was a ‘grass-roots’ movement of local urban office-holders, ratepayers and employers with more narrowly focused visions of what a community reformation of manners might achieve. The elites made their impact by lobbying for the royal edicts against profanity and vice which were issued in 1689, 1691 and 1697. The local activists made their impact by associating in vigilance and prosecuting societies, the first of these being formed in Tower Hamlets in 1690–1.¹⁶ In contrast to developments in the 1780s, it was the local associations which proved to have the greater staying power. Early state-endorsed attempts to mobilise a Protestant citizenry gave way to more geographically restricted but more tenacious law-enforcement campaigns by urban ratepayers against neighbourhood indecency and disorder. In London, the principal and, after 1700, the only sustained centre of organised activity, prosecutions for offences against good order came to exceed those (such as ‘Sabbath profanation’) which supposedly enforced God’s commandments.¹⁷

With loss of elite influence, of course, went loss of elite enthusiasm for volunteer citizen action. The slur on the competence and commitment to duty of magistrates, which prosecutions sponsored by associations of tradesmen seemed to imply, became harder to bear as the post-1689 regime stabilised.¹⁸ The fear of a mixed movement of all Protestants becoming a ‘Mungril Institution’ of Dissent-leaning laity became an increasing concern of Church authorities – authorities who had in any case, from the late 1690s, preferred to recast their priorities in a more pastoral direction. Patrons who remained committed found themselves increasingly disabled by entanglement in sectarian party politics.¹⁹

With the support of these elites largely withdrawn or devalued, the SRMs after 1700 gradually faded from view. In 1701 there had been ‘near twenty’ of them in London and a matching number in the provinces.²⁰ By 1738 the last of them issued its final report, worn down by the costs of operating in a public culture more committed to the defence of individual liberties than to the encouragement of self-appointed or privately paid enforcers of community standards of moral behaviour.²¹ An attempt by a combined group of Churchmen, Dissenters and Methodists to relaunch a London society in 1757 was formally encouraged by

¹⁶ Bahlman, *Moral Revolution*, pp. 14–17; Hayton, ‘Moral Reform’, pp. 53–5.

¹⁷ Shoemaker, ‘Reforming the City’, pp. 103–8, 112.

¹⁸ For evidence of the range of occupational ‘membership profiles’ in SRMs, see Bahlman, *Moral Revolution*, p. 69; T. Curtis and W. Speck, ‘The Societies for the Reformation of Manners: A Case Study in the Theory and Practice of Moral Reform’, *Literature and History*, no. 3 (1976), pp. 45–64 at pp. 47–8. For tensions between SRMs and magistrates, see Bahlman, *Moral Revolution*, pp. 51–3, 64–6.

¹⁹ Isaacs, ‘Anglican Hierarchy’, pp. 399–404. See also Bahlman, *Moral Revolution*, pp. 78–97, and Hayton, ‘Moral Reform’, pp. 54–7.

²⁰ Bahlman, *Moral Revolution*, pp. 38–40.

²¹ SRM cumulative prosecution totals stood at 102,000 by 1738. For the negative and ultimately fatal perceived link between the SRMs and the use of paid informers as prosecution witnesses, see Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 128–9, 148–9.

metropolitan authorities but allowed to lapse in the mid-1760s when it struck a familiar fatal obstruction – a crippling suit for civil law damages instituted by the acquitted defendant of a society-launched prosecution.²²

Why the SRMs failed to survive beyond a first generation of supporters remains a subject for speculation. The explanation given most weight here has been the withdrawal of support by key elites once the Revolution Settlement had set down secure institutional roots. Other suggested explanations have drawn attention to the way in which the growth of ‘rationality’ in eighteenth-century society helped to undermine the credibility of ‘providential’ interpretations of secular events – an elite development as well, presumably, given the continuing recourse to a rhetoric of communal transgression and propitiation in popular culture.²³ A full explanation of declining effort must also surely draw attention to the social breathing space brought about in the second quarter of the century by stable population, cost of living and crime levels. The recurrent laments of some front-line social observers aside, there does seem to have developed a belief among early Georgian philanthropic elites that most vicious behaviour was, with care, curable; and that, given the economic and defence needs of the nation, investment in cure and rehabilitation should have first call on voluntarily donated time and resources.²⁴

Whatever combination of arguments we adopt we are driven to the conclusion that the SRM experiment was notable more for its demonstration of volunteer associational potential than of achievement. Of the significance of that demonstration effect, however, there can be no doubt. A precedent had been set in choice both of goals and of methods of implementing them. More diffusely, but even more importantly, the experiment confirmed the existence and potential for expansion in England of a social space for the resolution of public issues in ways not confined to the exercise of monopoly authority on the one hand by the state and on the other by household or local community.

This latter development – sometimes labelled in sociological shorthand ‘the structural transformation of the public sphere’ – was to be the backdrop against which was played out the following century and a half of moral reform debate. The existence, that is to say, of a set of rules and channels of communication which assumed the legitimacy (even mutual benefit) of exchange of opinion between state authorities and associations of private citizens was a precondition for the emergence of the politics of volunteer moral activism which forms

²² J. Wesley, ‘Sermon Preached before Society for Reformation of Manners January 30, 1763’, in *Works* (1872), vi.149–67, esp. pp. 151–4, 167; Radzinowicz, *History*, iii.146.

²³ Curtis and Speck, ‘Societies for the Reformation of Manners’, pp. 59–60. For evidence of a redirection of some volunteer energies back into the mould of the ‘religious society’, see J. Walsh, ‘Religious Societies: Methodist and Evangelical, 1738–1800’, in W. Shiels and D. Wood (eds.), *Voluntary Religion* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 283–4ff.

²⁴ D. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police* (Princeton, 1989), ch. 2; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 145–8.

the central subject of this book. The exact dating of this process of transformation is, naturally, open to varying estimates, but in the English case the embryonic formation of a 'public sphere' of citizen-initiated activity is usually traced to the final decades of the seventeenth century. Its political dimension becomes apparent as a result of the stalemate created by the confrontations of the English Civil War and Restoration era: the appearance of regular parliaments and of tolerated religious pluralism are signs that open debate about state and ecclesiastical policy are no longer automatically repressed as subversion and disloyalty. The political dimension is underpinned by the emergence of a more 'mature' form of commercial capitalism requiring the reliable legal recognition of the rights of private individuals, and the right of private individuals to combine to protect their interests in public policy debate. And both these dimensions are 'braced' by a third: the emergence of a culture which accepts the legitimacy of free exchange of information and opinion between all citizens who have a stake in policy outcomes and the capacity to argue a case.²⁵

Without these broad developments a volunteer associational approach to the reform of national morals could hardly have been imagined, let alone put into practice. And yet the transition to the new public culture did not guarantee automatic success. Precisely because of the nature of the forces in play to sustain the public sphere, voluntary associations of concerned citizens were also constrained to associate, organise and operate in certain structurally conditioned ways. Freedom from state and ecclesiastical regulation was one side of the coin; increased dependence on individually or collectively motivated subscribers was the other. Ability to recruit, regardless of geographically defined, occupational or religious status (sometimes gender status as well), was balanced by obligation to establish lines of communication by alternative, market-sensitive methods. Publicity for a good cause could not be taken for granted: not all publicity would be good publicity for the cause in a public sphere of multiple opinions and viewpoints. Above all, commitment to the cause could never be taken for granted. Recruits had to be given a sense of participation in management and volunteer elites had to project a sense of awareness of accountability to supporters.²⁶ The first generation of moral reform voluntary associations, as we

²⁵ For identification of the year 1695 as a point of decisive shift in all three dimensions, political, economic and intellectual, see Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, esp. pp. 58–9, also pp. 36–7, 62. For the 'pre-history' of voluntary association in England, see P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement. Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998), esp. ch. 7; Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*. For the 'pre-history' of moral reform, see M. Ingram, 'Reformation of Manners in Early Modern England', in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (1996), ch. 2.

²⁶ See, *inter alia*, J. Innes, 'The "Mixed Economy of Welfare" in Early Modern England', in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past* (1996), pp. 153–4; P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798* (1991), pp. 492–4; R. J. Morris, 'Clubs, Societies and Associations', in *CSHB*, iii.395.

have just seen, found many of these hurdles too high to clear at the first attempt. This, too, was part of the deposit of experience available for the instruction of those who cared to look.

A new sense of urgency: the moral crisis of the 1780s

If a first burst of enthusiasm for citizen-initiated moral reform had flared and burned out between the 1690s and 1730s, what concerns can be identified to explain the rekindling of enthusiasm and commitment in the 1780s? The question is best tackled by breaking it down once again to deal with shifts at several levels of social awareness. We must deal first with the implications of economic and demographic change, recognising as we do so that, while such change had strong social impact, it was an impact not always knowable to (let alone measurable by) contemporaries. Next we must explore culture shifts – shifts which register the way in which certain social groups battled to impose *their* perception of morally orderly (and disorderly) behaviour on their contemporaries. A final survey of political and institutional developments will allow us to judge what drove contemporaries over the threshold of anxiety into the practical world of organisation, agendas and programmes of action.

On the demographic front we now know conclusively (as contemporaries did not) that the third quarter of the eighteenth century saw a major acceleration in English population growth. The peak rate of increase was not to be reached until the early 1820s but already, between 1771 and 1786, the population of England is estimated to have jumped from 6.45 million to 7.29 million, a process revealing an annual rate of increase almost twice that experienced in the half-century before.²⁷ And this population was distributing itself in a pattern which, in two significant aspects, may have accentuated the contemporary perception of change. On the one hand, the population increase was most marked in the industrial and commercial parts of the country. (The West Riding of Yorkshire, for example, had an estimated population of 300,000 in 1751, 460,000 in 1781 and 580,000 in 1801, this in spite of a net migration loss to other neighbouring counties over the period. Population growth in the London area, in Warwickshire and in Lancashire took place at a comparable rate.²⁸) On the other hand, the increase also produced a consistently more youthful population. Again, this trend did not peak until the 1820s, but throughout the second half of the eighteenth century the proportion of infants, children and young adults in the population was growing. (By 1781 it had reached 53 per cent, up from 51 per cent in 1761; its 1826 peak was 58 per cent.²⁹) In practice,

²⁷ E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541–1871* (1981), pp. 208–9.

²⁸ P. Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688–1959* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1967), pp. 103–5, 119–20.

²⁹ Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, pp. 443–4, 528–9.

these trends were calculated to have an impact rather greater than the arithmetic of the situation would suggest, for, as we shall see, both geographical and age-specific groups had established reputations for social indiscipline and moral irregularity. These reputations were often sufficient to generate anxieties even when contemporaries could not agree over the precise rate, or even direction, of population movement overall.³⁰

Population shifts were also entwined with trends in economic activity, another focus for unease. While historians now tend to down-play the significance of the mid to late eighteenth century as a period of take-off to 'industrial revolution', they remain eager to label the period as one crucial to the emergence of a nationally organised market society, drawing particular attention to the spread of commercially operated networks for the supply of goods and services once produced locally or not at all.³¹ To contemporaries, of course, the intrusion of the market posed problems of moral adjustment, more or less acute. To some the spread of a system of distribution driven by supplier self-interest and customer self-gratification was a development to be welcomed: 'I agreed with him . . . that there was a great deal of debauchery, much looseness of behaviour, and very little religion' reported Earl Fitzwilliam of a conversation with Wilberforce in mid-1787,³² 'but then I could not agree with him, that it ever would be otherwise, as long as there continued a great deal of activity, trade and riches: that the latter produc'd the former, and if he wish'd that the former should not exist, I advis'd him to apply the proper remedy by annihilating the latter.' Others, like Wilberforce, agonised over the potential of market-stimulated appetites to tear society apart.

In intellectual circles such issues had been the subject of intense debate for a generation and more: the 'Mandeville paradox' of 'private vices' producing 'public benefits' had been recurrently debated by a distinguished cast of theologians and moral philosophers ever since the Middlesex grand jury's condemnation of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* as a blasphemous and subversive publication in 1723.³³ By the 1780s we find the theoretical concerns of moral philosophers regularly reflected in the practical social analyses of magistrates, clergy and concerned citizens.

³⁰ J. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660–1800* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 245–7; P. King, 'Decision-Makers and Decision-Making in the English Criminal Law, 1750–1800', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), pp. 34ff.

³¹ D. McCloskey, '1780–1860: A Survey', in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700* (3 vols., 2nd edn, Cambridge, 1994), i.244–9; J. Styles, 'Manufacturing, Consumption and Design in 18th-Century England', in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), pp. 535–42.

³² Fitzwilliam to H. Zouch, [August] 1787, WWM, E234/14.

³³ E. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's 'Fable'. Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 18–23. It is worth noting that Mandeville's notoriety as a(n) (im)moralist was based in large part on his expressed contempt for attempts to curb appetite-based behaviour such as those made by SRMs: M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 90–1.

The symptoms of market anxiety took many forms. One major focus of concern was the moral breakdown which appeared to be inseparable from the growth of large towns and cities. These were centres of commercial opportunity, conspicuous consumption and employment prospects: they were also centres attracting large numbers of people in casual, insecure employment verging into destitution and crime.³⁴ 'Idle and disorderly persons of both sexes, and of all descriptions, are every where to be met with, living, many of them, in a state of perpetual vagrancy', noted the Revd Henry Zouch, a West Riding magistrate, in 1786. An explosion of urban crime was only to be expected, given 'the unparalleled amount of moving property exposed in transit in this great Metropolis, as well as the vast and unexampled increase of this property, within the last half century', argued the London magistrate, Patrick Colquhoun, from the later vantage point of 1795. The 'multiplication of great cities . . . & . . . the habit . . . of frequenting a splendid and luxurious metropolis . . . powerfully tend to accelerate the discontinuance of the religious habits of a purer age, and to accomplish the substitution of a more relaxed morality', added Wilberforce two years later.³⁵ The contrast between rural innocence and urban depravity was, of course, a stock contrast of social and moral critics long before the closing decades of the eighteenth century, and was to remain so.³⁶ Yet the increasing size and functional specialisation of towns – the drift to anonymity and spatial segregation of social ranks – helped to intensify fears already culturally entrenched.³⁷

A second sign of anxiety about the market-organised society was an upsurge of interest in the long-standing debate about the moral implications of a high-wage economy, and the opportunities for 'luxury' spending and 'licentious' behaviour which this afforded. Conspicuous consumption was a vice afflicting rich as well as poor, and late-century moralists were to deplore in increasingly strident tones the effects of this consumption both as a corrupting example to the less fortunate and as a cause of 'effeminacy' and a relaxed sense of public

³⁴ *Statement and Propositions from the Society for Giving Effect to His Majesty's Proclamation against Vice and Immorality, Delivered to the Magistrates, at their Meeting Held at the St Alban's Tavern, on Wednesday the 5 of May, 1790* (1790), pp. 1–2. Cf. Adam Smith on the city dweller: 'His conduct is observed and attended to by nobody and he is therefore very likely to neglect it himself, and to abandon himself to every sort of low profligacy and vice', *Wealth of Nations* (6th edn, ii.280), cited in J. M. Beattie, 'The Pattern of Crime in England 1660–1800', *Past and Present*, no. 62 (1974), p. 93.

³⁵ Zouch, *Hints*, p. 2; P. Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (first published 1795; 7th edn, 1806), p. 603; W. Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity* (2nd edn, 1797), p. 372.

³⁶ K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (1983), pp. 243–54; R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973), pp. 142ff.

³⁷ On urban anonymity, see M. Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774–1858* (1994), pp. 3, 42–51. On segregation and suburbia, see Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 418–23, 441, and *Public Life*, pp. 449–51.

duty among the rich themselves.³⁸ Spending by the rich, however, could be justified, in economic terms at least: '[I]t is the diffusion, rather than the degree of luxury, which is to be dreaded as a national evil . . . So long as the prevalence of luxury is confined to a few of elevated rank, much of the benefit is felt, and little of the inconveniency.'³⁹ Adam Smith had in fact argued in the 1770s that *all* emulative consumption was to be welcomed, economically as a spur to productivity and morally as a spur to individual self-improvement; but his views on this point were still far from winning uncontested acceptance in the 1780s.⁴⁰ 'Luxury' spending among the labouring population remained disquieting – for a variety of reasons. For employers, the most disturbing aspect of a high-wage economy was its supposed tendency to remove the incentive to steady labour. Magistrates and property-owners, on the other hand, were more concerned about the consumption patterns and heightened consumer expectations which high wages made possible. The concerns of both groups might frequently overlap to produce a composite generalisation about the innate propensity of the lower orders to idleness, vice, disorder and crime. Thus the Revd Henry Zouch once more, this time reviewing his experience of popular behaviour at horse-races, fairs and markets:

[W]hen the common people are drawn together upon *any* public occasion, a variety of mischiefs are certain to ensue: allured by unlawful pastimes, or even by vulgar amusements only, they wantonly waste their time and money, to their own great loss and that of their employers. Nay a whole neighbourhood becomes thereby unhinged in such a manner, that there is a general stagnation of labour for many days; the young and inexperienced, are here initiated in every species of immorality and profaneness: quarrels and disturbances are too often promoted, and of course, a great deal of irksome business is thrown upon Justices of the Peace.⁴¹

Such generalisations as these depended partly on changing patterns of behaviour among labouring people, partly on a change in behavioural expectations among employers and public authorities themselves. It was true that labouring people were gaining increased (if uneven) access to market-provided goods and recreational opportunities. It was also likely that, in an increasingly

³⁸ W. Paley, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), p. 598; Zouch, *Hints*, p. 16; [A. Fitzroy, duke of Grafton], *Hints, etc. Submitted to the Serious Attention of the Clergy, Nobility and Gentry, Newly Associated, by a Layman* (2nd edn, 1789), pp. 5–10; Wilberforce, *Practical View*, pp. 371–2; *Proclamation Society. Report for 1799* [1800], p. 19. For a general view of the 1780s literature and its antecedents, see Langford, *Public Life*, pp. 460–4.

³⁹ Paley, *Principles*, pp. 598–9.

⁴⁰ *Wealth of Nations*, book I, ch. viii. For modern evaluations of Smith's position, see G. Himmel-farb, *The Idea of Poverty. England in the Early Industrial Age* (1984), pp. 48–51; C. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury* (Cambridge, 1994), ch. 6. On the debate in general, see A. W. Coats, 'Changing Attitudes to Labour in the Mid-18th Century', in M. Flinn and T. C. Smout (eds.), *Essays in Social History* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 88–91.

⁴¹ Zouch, *Hints*, pp. 6–7.

market-dependent society where, from the 1770s onwards, price inflation was eroding the purchasing power of wages in several major trades, propertied observers would tend to deplore the way in which labouring people ordered their spending priorities. It was certainly the case that industrial employers and property-owners were demanding a higher level of work discipline and public order in the 1780s than they had done a generation before.⁴² As the gap between expectation and experience widened, so the incentive to moralise grew.

A third measure of the unease aroused by unrestrained commercial growth is to be found in responses to the growth of a particular industry – that of publishing. If any one industry aroused anxiety about consumer frailty more widely than another, it was (the liquor trade, perhaps, excepted) the publishing industry. The subversive potential of mass literacy had long been recognised in general terms,⁴³ but the massive success of late eighteenth-century publishers in locating new markets for exploitation gave immediate and recurring reason to deplore the growing licentiousness of the press. In some degree this increased sensitivity may be seen as one facet of the general concern felt for the moral indiscipline of the lower orders. ‘Indecent ballads’ decorating cottage walls in ‘almost every village in the kingdom’, according to one Middlesex magistrate in 1787, were an affront to ‘all those who wish to promote the decency, morals and good order of the lower classes of the people’.⁴⁴ By the mid-1790s, as we shall see, attitudes such as these were to be overlaid by explicit fears of political and social subversion – English Jacobins retailing French revolutionary ideas to the gullible English masses – and concern about the reading matter of the lower orders turned to panic.

Yet, in contrast to critiques of consumer indulgence on other fronts, debate about the perils of print tended to focus as much on the moral subversion of the property-owning classes as of the labouring masses. Critics gave various accounts of the essential nature of the problem as it affected the middle and upper ranks. The more tradition-minded were most disturbed about the claims to individual independence and personal fulfilment implicit in the self-indulgent fantasy life encouraged by commercial literature. The more modern and ‘sentimental’ found their touchstone of morality more in the cultivation of domestic affection than in obedience to patriarchal authority, thus taking claims to individual moral autonomy more in their stride.⁴⁵ Even they, however, found

⁴² Styles, ‘Manufacturing’, pp. 538–9; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 150–1, 458–9; P. Mathias, ‘Leisure and Wages in Theory and Practice’, in *The Transformation of England* (New York, 1979), pp. 348–67; E. P. Thompson, ‘Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, in Flinn and Smout, *Essays in Social History*, pp. 55ff.

⁴³ L. Stone, ‘Literacy and Education in England 1640–1900’, *Past and Present*, no. 42 (1969), pp. 84–5.

⁴⁴ Glasse, *Narrative*, p. 10. Cf. Langford, *Public Life*, p. 469.

⁴⁵ L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (1977), pp. 221–9. Cf. R. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650–1850* (1998), ch. 4, esp. pp. 88–90.

the unbridled commercial appeal to individual gratification distressing and an implicit challenge to fondly held beliefs about the innocence of women and children.⁴⁶ Both these broad and overlapping groupings, therefore, found common ground in deploring a threat to family cohesion as they perceived it. In 1775 Sheridan had been able to raise a laugh about the issue:

Madam, a circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge. It blossoms through the year. And depend on it, Mrs Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves will long for the fruit at last.⁴⁷

But during the 1780s the 'problem' became more widespread, more visible and more worrying to educated elites accustomed to regard print as a medium for instruction rather than for market-assisted recreation. In the wake of circulating libraries came the first generation of securely based women's magazines, an unprecedented boom in the writing and publication of works of romantic fiction and, on the male side of the market (chiefly), an expansion in the range and availability of literature with an explicitly sexual focus.⁴⁸ As recent historians of 'the culture of sensibility' have pointed out, the two developments were related in the sense that both relied on the stimulation of the individual imagination by commercially assisted means.⁴⁹

The rise of a culture of sensibility among the 'comfortable' ranks of society in practice cut two ways. On the one hand, it encouraged emotional candour and thus valued the ability to relate 'sympathetically' to the emotional states of others. This, as we shall see, was to be of considerable assistance to campaigners on behalf of 'objects of pity' such as slaves, wronged women, children and animals. On the other hand, it also acted to heighten anxieties that, in a market-tempted culture, passions might be stimulated in a way that defied control.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ R. Porter, 'Mixed Feelings: The Enlightenment and Sexuality in 18th-Century Britain', in P. G. Boucé (ed.), *Sexuality in 18th-Century Britain* (Manchester, 1982), pp. 16, 20; J. H. Plumb, 'The New World of Children in 18th-Century England', in N. McKendrick *et al.*, *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (1983), pp. 290–1, 312.

⁴⁷ Sheridan, *The Rivals*, Act I, scene ii, quoted in A. Adburgham, *Women in Print. Writing Women and Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (1972), p. 167. For subscription libraries, see Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 94–5.

⁴⁸ Adburgham, *Women in Print*, pp. 121, 148, 153–5; Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 285; Porter in Boucé, *Sexuality*, pp. 8–11. For the argument that the rise of the novel and of the pornographic imagination were related developments, see D. Kraakman, 'Pornography in Western European Culture', in F. Eder, L. Hall and G. Hekma (eds.), *Sexual Cultures in Europe. Themes in Sexuality* (Manchester, 1999), ch. 5.

⁴⁹ See G. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in 18th-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), ch. 6, esp. pp. 312–13; discussion linking the development to the broader arguments about the role of 'emotionalist hedonism' in the development of a 'consumerist society' set out in C. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987), chs. 2 and 7.

⁵⁰ For the cult of sensibility and the rise of humanitarian feeling, see the useful overview in K. Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture',

And, indeed, with the expansion of market supply of ‘the pleasures of the imagination’ came a surge of claims about nature imitating art. Elopements, seductions, adulteries – all, it was claimed, had become more frequent in modern times. How much hard fact there was behind these claims it is difficult, probably impossible, to determine. ‘Enlightened’ opinion in the 1770s and 80s may possibly have been more tolerant of the open expression of ‘natural drives’ than had been the case in the previous generation, but it is likely that the ‘visibility’ of the behaviour publicised by market forces was, in its own right, at least as important a factor in creating an impression of moral degeneration.⁵¹ Whatever the case may be, it is clear that an increasing number of (chiefly male) commentators were seizing on the tangible signs of commercially stimulated moral delinquency available to them as an opportunity to signal their concern about deeper-set and slower-moving changes in relations between male and female, parent and child.

All this said, it must be admitted that diffusely expressed forebodings of ‘moral decline’ were, if mutant in form and variable in intensity, the staple of much public debate in most decades of the eighteenth century. No doubt the increased power of the commercial press helped to amplify the sense of slide from certainty which had taken hold by the early 1780s. No doubt the population and economic pressures which intertwined to produce an impression of a society pledged to the pursuit of short-term gratification colour the tone of post-1770s debate over morals in a way which distinguishes it as the opening of a new era. It required, nonetheless, a *political* crisis in the early and mid-1780s to give the anxious a sense of urgency sufficient to provoke some of them into committed public action.

The central political issue of the mid-1780s was, as all agreed, the debate about how best to cut free from, and pay for, the war with the American colonies and their continental allies. In January 1783 peace terms were accepted; the independence of the colonies was recognised. The international settlement, however, merely cleared the stage for a reckoning of domestic accounts.

Among the politically articulate classes the loss of the American colonies produced a crisis of confidence in national institutions and, in some, a fear of the onset of national decadence. As a disillusioned Horace Walpole summed up national prospects early in 1784:

American Historical Review, 100 (1995), pp. 303–9. For contemporary anxieties about ‘excessive sensibility’, see Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 463ff.; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 224–6, 278, 326ff.

⁵¹ Adburgham, *Women in Print*, pp. 188–201; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 477–8, 582ff., and *Public Life*, p. 545; D. Andrew, ‘Adultery-à-la-Mode: Privilege, the Law and Attitudes to Adultery 1770–1809’, *History*, 82 (1997), pp. 5–23. For evidence of the emergence of a national publishing distribution system at this time, see J. Brewer and I. McCalman, ‘Publishing’, in McCalman (ed.), *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 197–206.

In a general view, I suppose we shall fall into all the distractions of a ruined country. The memory of what we have been so recently will exasperate our feelings – or we shall grow insensible, remain dissipated till totally impoverished, and perhaps imagine from indolence that submission is ease!⁵²

Evidence in support of such judgements was readily enough available to those in search of it. The political instability of the early 1780s had produced widespread feelings of revulsion against politicians as a class – condemnation of their incompetence but, further than this, condemnation of their apparent inability to put public good before private gain, nation before faction, and personal probity before corruption and waste of state resources. This mood gives some clue to the enthusiasm with which ‘public opinion’ greeted the break with the past signalled by the installation of Wilberforce’s twenty-four-year-old friend, William Pitt, as first minister of the crown in December 1783. The record of Pitt’s predecessors in office, according to one of their disillusioned supporters (and a foundation member of the Proclamation Society), gave a lesson to posterity ‘that the most amiable men in private life could not resist temptation when public advantage was set in opposition to interest’.⁵³ The mood also helps to account for the remarkable success of the era’s most formidable extra-parliamentary pressure group – Christopher Wyvill’s County Association movement. This was a movement for parliamentary purification and ‘economical reform’ which could, at its height, claim to represent a quarter of the English electorate. Its overriding goals as Wyvill recalled them were, first, ‘the preservation of our constitution on its genuine principles’ and, second, ‘the restoration of national morals, then sinking under the debasing influence of our government’.⁵⁴ From such instances as these we see that the whole appeal to ‘restore’ the primacy of public duty (‘virtue’) over private interest, imbued as it was with potent overtones of classical political theory about the rise and fall of empires, gave a powerful rhetorical vocabulary to those grappling with the psychological and social aftermath of war at national level.⁵⁵

The appeal also had its applications at local level as the men who set the tone of national political debate struggled to control the effects of post-war dislocation in their own communities. For, by the mid-1780s, all conventional indicators of ‘social health’ combined to suggest that the lower orders were as infected by

⁵² W. S. Lewis (ed.), *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence* (48 vols., New Haven CT and London, 1937–83), xxv.487.

⁵³ Richard Slater Milnes at York, 25 March 1784, quoted in E. A. Smith, *Whig Principles and Party Politics. Earl Fitzwilliam and the Whig Party 1748–1833* (Manchester, 1975), p. 76. See also P. Harling, *The Waning of ‘Old Corruption’* (Oxford, 1996), p. 32.

⁵⁴ I. R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform. The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics 1760–1785* (1962), p. 72.

⁵⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), chs.14–15, esp. p. 510. Cf. Wilberforce, *Life*, i.82–5, 131; Zouch, *Hints*, p. 16.

the profligate and opportunist mood of the moment as their superiors. Poor rates were on the rise; demobilised army recruits and unemployed migrant workers threatened to reduce the conventions of parish-based poor relief to a shambles; liquor consumption was presenting magistrates with severe problems of public order and pauperisation; and there was a well-publicised crime wave.⁵⁶ Under these circumstances even the most forbearing and role-hardened members of the ruling elite were being driven privately to admit that ‘the people’ were ‘to be sure . . . very debauch’d’. Given this perception of community degeneration, authorities, ratepayers and property-owners faced the problem of deciding whether the wave of disorder and excess was the cyclical (and eventually self-correcting) one customarily associated with the end of wars or whether it marked the beginning of a more threatening trend.⁵⁷

The traditional response to such crises was to use the legal system to ‘make examples’ of selected offenders in the expectation of deterring others but, by 1785, it needed a strong nerve to continue unqualified support for such a policy. The number of hangings in Middlesex, for example, reached its highest point in recorded memory that year, yet the effect seemed more to revolt ‘humane and thinking men’ among the elite than to deter further offenders.⁵⁸ Would-be reformers, however, needed to produce an alternative to replace what they proposed to dismantle and here they faced a dilemma. The executive power of English government was weak. This was widely acknowledged. (The evidence of the 1780 Gordon Riots in London could hardly be ignored.) Besides, in matters involving the ‘censorship of morals’ English public authorities had abdicated most of the rights they had once claimed to possess. They were therefore likely to prove poor agents for implementing any ‘scheme of police’ argued from the premise that ‘the most effectual way to prevent the greater crimes is by punishing the smaller’.⁵⁹ And reformers knew that few in public life would have it otherwise. A central government in control of a professional ‘police force’ based on principles of ‘prevention’ would be a general affront to all that was most distinctive about English liberty, a threat to the right of individuals and of communities to order their own lives, and an opening to

⁵⁶ For poor law expenditure and laws of settlement, see P. Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531–1782* (1990), pp. 30–1, and U. Henriques, *Before the Welfare State. Social Administration in Early Industrial Britain* (1979), pp. 13–15, 19. On liquor consumption and fears of pauperisation, see S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government*, xi.75. On crime, see Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England*, pp. 223–5, 555, 582ff., and King, ‘Decision-Makers’, pp. 34–9.

⁵⁷ Fitzwilliam to Zouch, 11 Sept. 1787, WWM, E234/15; W. M. Godschall, *A General Plan of Parochial and Provincial Police* (1787), pp. 1–3.

⁵⁸ The duke of Manchester’s phrase: Manchester to Wilberforce, 18 Sept. 1787, Wilberforce papers (Duke). For mid-1780s sentencing and execution patterns, see Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 582ff.; M. Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain. The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1750–1850* (1978), pp. 86–93; Radzinowicz, *History*, i.147–8.

⁵⁹ Wilberforce to Wyvill, 25 July 1787, Wyvill MSS, North Yorks. CRO, ZFW 7/2/59/11 (partly reprinted in Wilberforce, *Life*, i.131). Cf. Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 421–2.

continental despotism. In terms of the immediate political climate such a scheme would at once attract charges of expense and likely use as a patronage machine, thus running counter to popular demands for 'economical reform'. For all these reasons the problems of socialisation and good order which loomed so large were unlikely to be solved by an extension of official powers and resources. And indeed, when Pitt dutifully tried to professionalise the policing of metropolitan London in 1785, his bill was defeated on the basis of these arguments.⁶⁰

We see therefore that, by 1785, it had become clear that official solutions were unobtainable, and in any case not widely desired. The obvious next-best position was to call for a renewed commitment towards the performance of public duty by existing magistrates, combined with a pledge among 'the respectable' to assist public authorities by voluntary effort. This is precisely what Wilberforce's carefully presented scheme claimed to offer.⁶¹

The moral reform project of the 1780s: leaders, motives, networks

What, then, was Wilberforce's scheme? A first point to notice is that the Proclamation Society was never a large organisation. Participation, as measured by membership, never much exceeded 150 in the years between its foundation in 1787–8 and its absorption into the Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1803–5.⁶² The social background of members, too, reinforced its elite appearance. Wilberforce had hoped to recruit 'persons of consequence in every line of life, the professions, members of both Houses [of Parliament], merchants in the city, aldermen, etc.'. In practice, the membership and especially the active (committee-serving) membership tended to contract towards the more exclusive circles of Westminster and the court.⁶³ By the mass-mobilisation standards of a later age, these were not encouraging signs. The promoters, however, did not interpret them as a setback to the society's effectiveness – rather the reverse given its particular goals and preferred means of exerting influence.

From the negative viewpoint, one explicitly acknowledged aim was to protect activists from charges of venality and puritanical zeal which previous associations for moral reform had attracted. Earl Fitzwilliam, Wilberforce's most trenchant critic in 1787, having 'seen London in flames only seven years ago' at the time of the Gordon Riots, warned that the control of the respectable over

⁶⁰ S. H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 89–92.

⁶¹ Wilberforce, *Life*, i.393. Cf. Langford, *Public Life*, p. 477, also Slack, *Reformation to Improvement*, pp. 160–3.

⁶² Membership peaked at 163 in 1800: *Proclamation Society. Report for 1800* (1801), pp. 13–15.

⁶³ Wilberforce, *Life*, i.133. For full membership analysis, see Innes, 'Politics and Morals', pp. 79–86.

'ignorant enthusiasm and disappointed hypocrisy' might prove short-lived, but even this response implicitly conceded the social reliability of the founding elite.⁶⁴ More positively, the hope was that, having gained the confidence of the governing classes, the society might expect to cultivate connections on a national scale using the magistracy, the parish clergy and other less formalised networks to forward its goals. This hope was firmly based. The Proclamation Society in its early and most active phase did carve out for itself a central position in the professionalising world of active magistrates, philanthropists and evangelisers – a world made up, as we shall see, of individuals sensitive to signs of social strain and official inadequacy in response, yet aware also of the drawbacks and impracticality of pinning all hopes on state-sponsored solutions. It is natural, therefore, to find links between the Proclamation Society and other volunteer movements of the decade.

The most noteworthy link, perhaps, is that with the Sunday school movement. This movement, so far as it gained visibility at a national level, was an initiative of the early and mid-1780s with goals and attitudes towards recruitment, organisation and methods of operation directly comparable with those of the Proclamation Society. Thus, when the Sunday School Society was set up in London in 1785, it announced itself 'united to prevent the corruption of morals and advance the peace and felicity of the country'.⁶⁵ Its organisers, like those of the Proclamation Society, disclaimed any directive role but aimed to co-ordinate, publicise and encourage local action by concerned community leaders, and indeed the moral reform resolutions of the West Riding and other county benches which preceded and accompanied the royal proclamation of 1787 usually endorsed the sponsorship of Sunday schools as an act calculated to 'produce an happy change in the general morals of the people, and thereby render the execution of criminal justice less frequently necessary'.⁶⁶ On a personal level men such as the Revd Dr Samuel Glasse, William Morton Pitt, Wilberforce and the Thornton brothers were active in promoting both causes, as was Thomas Raikes, banker brother of the most celebrated Sunday school promoter of all – Robert Raikes of Gloucester.

A similar pattern of overlapping goals, attitudes and personnel may be traced in other movements springing up to meet the changed conditions of the 1780s, notably in the fields of prison reform and poor law administration. Prison reform, which had begun in the 1770s as the rather eccentric crusade of the Dissenting outsider, John Howard, was, a decade later, on the point of acceptance and

⁶⁴ Fitzwilliam to Zouch, 11 Sept. 1787, WWM, E234/15. Cf. Zouch, *Hints*, p. 8; Glasse, *Narrative*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ T. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability. Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780–1850* (New Haven CT and London, 1976), p. 34.

⁶⁶ Glasse, *Narrative*, p. 19. Cf. Zouch, *Hints*, p. 16; Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, pp. 21–8; A. P. Wadsworth, 'The First Manchester Sunday Schools', in Flinn and Smout, *Essays in Social History*, p. 100.

adaptation by progressive members of the magistracy all over the country. Loss of the American penal colonies had combined with the post-war crime wave to make prison reform an urgent public issue. Once again, therefore, it appears as a worthy cause in the lists of resolutions passed by leading county benches in 1786–7; and men such as Sir G. O. Paul (Gloucester magistrate and gaol reformer) and, notably, William Mainwaring and Samuel Glasse (Middlesex magistrates and promoters of the new house of correction at Coldbath Fields) may be found active in both causes.⁶⁷ As to the poor law, debate on its general scope and purpose remained deadlocked until the mid-1790s when, as we shall see, the Proclamation Society provided a cradle for the nurture of Thomas Bernard's 'Bettering Society'. But almost a decade before this the society was playing a prominent part in the 'pre-history' of poor law reform. The spectre of rising poor rates was leading some magistrates, even before the proclamation was issued, to call upon public-spirited informants to help in their campaign to reduce pauperism, crime and disorder by stricter enforcement of public house licensing regulations.⁶⁸ Above all, fear of expense made magistrates receptive to attempts sponsored by the Proclamation Society to patch the fraying fabric of the laws of settlement. These laws, intended to define the limits of community responsibility for the poor, assumed an essentially static and parish-based workforce and were now rapidly being overwhelmed by the decade of trade disruption and emergent free labour markets already mentioned.⁶⁹

More problematic, because more open to the accusation of sectarian enthusiasm, was the link with the emerging slave trade abolition movement of the 1780s. This movement, financed and at first almost exclusively organised by London Quakers, nevertheless needed the support of Churchmen and public office-holders capable of operating within high political circles to achieve its goal.⁷⁰ As we know, this support had, by 1787, proved relatively easy to find: the crucial act of recruitment of the articulate young MP, William Wilberforce, took place in late 1786 via the Middleton-Porteus circle of Church Evangelicals which was shortly afterwards to play a key role in supporting the development of the Proclamation Society.⁷¹ The triggers to public action in both cases also overlapped: the disastrous end of the American war left a religion-sensitive fragment

⁶⁷ Zouch, *Hints*, pp. 13–15; Glasse, *Narrative*, p. 22; Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 97, 127. See also *Proclamation Society. Statement* (1790), pp. 19–22; and *Proclamation Society. Report of the Sub-Committee Respecting . . . Prisons and Houses of Correction in England and Wales* (1790), pp. 1, 15.

⁶⁸ Zouch, *Hints*, p. 5; Glasse, *Narrative*, pp. 5, 21, 40–2, 47; Webb, *English Local Government*, xi.55–90.

⁶⁹ *Proclamation Society. Statement* (1790), pp. 1–17.

⁷⁰ *List of the Society, Instituted in 1787, For the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1788); J. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery. The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 41–4.

⁷¹ Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, pp. 72–3. See also C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery. The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (1992), p. 16, for an evaluation of the particular role of women in the Middleton-Porteus circle.

of the propertied elite with a 'psychic wound' requiring symbolic communal repair. Abolition of the slave trade provided a national goal through which a sense of moral purpose could be reasserted after the shaming experience of a war in which kin had fought kin, and Protestant fellow Protestant.⁷² Abolition was, however, a cause which required something more than the mobilisation of administrative elites for success. It was a cause seeking specific political action by openly political means – means including the arousal of support among the electorate at large and perhaps even among the general population.⁷³ The tensions which resulted in the democracy-fearing 1790s between the London-based realists of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and their over-enthusiastic provincial supporters were eventually to drive the London leaders to suspend their campaign altogether. In the more reform-receptive 1780s, however, there was on balance more to be gained than lost by linking in the public mind the more radical with the more conservative variants of moral reform. The link as personified in Wilberforce helped to depoliticise the appearance of both movements, so making it possible to keep open lines of communication between Pittites and Foxites, Churchmen and Dissenters, evangelicals and rationalist Unitarians, which might otherwise have been closed off to the damage of both causes.⁷⁴

From evidence such as this, therefore, we see how the Proclamation Society forms part of an extended series of interlocking moral reform activities and causes. And within this informally linked world of voluntary commitment there are further patterns of experience, thought and behaviour to be traced. One pattern to emerge is that based on regional variation. The first point to note here is the very existence of a movement capable of claiming a network of support outside London. The SRMs in the late 1690s and the charity school and workhouse movements of the opening years of the eighteenth century had, it is true, spread their networks in semi-systematic but unsustainable pattern across some centres beyond London.⁷⁵ But the movement of the 1780s seems to have been the first to envisage the scope of its network as national from the start and, in

⁷² L. Colley, *Britons* (New Haven CT, 1992), pp. 352–4; C. Brown, 'Foundations of British Abolitionism, Beginnings to 1789' (Oxford D.Phil., 1994), pp. 76, 87ff.

⁷³ Note, however, the now well-documented case for regarding the antislavery petitioning campaigns of 1788–92 as a carefully guided attempt to demonstrate 'respectable public opinion' rather than a 'mass mobilisation': Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, pp. 46–50, 56–60, 103–13; Brown, 'Foundations', pp. 205, 212, 214.

⁷⁴ Cf. Innes, 'Politics and Morals', p. 76, n. 45. For the strongest version of the case for regarding abolition as a cause which Quakers and Evangelical Churchmen organised and which political/religious 'liberals' then 'merely' joined, see Brown, 'Foundations', ch. IV, esp. p. 189. Brown also uncovers the use made of Sunday School Association and Proclamation Society networks (as well as Quaker and County Association networks) by the London Abolition Society in its provincial organising drive of 1787–8 (pp. 155, 181–8).

⁷⁵ T. Hitchcock, 'Paupers and Preachers', in Davison *et al.*, *Stilling the Grumbling Hive*, pp. 149–50, and see note 10 above.

contrast to the precedent of the 1690s, was as much provincial as metropolitan in origins. (The pre-1787 activities of county magistrates have already been noted. It remains to add that the very idea of a London-based society to act as a clearing-house and lobby group for moral reform activity appears to be traceable to Wilberforce's West Riding electoral agent, medical adviser and spiritual confidant, William Hey of Leeds – though the strategy of working under warrant of a royal proclamation remains Wilberforce's to claim.⁷⁶) Once the call for volunteer assistance had been made, the response was certainly more enthusiastic in northern industrialising towns than elsewhere in the country and the impact on local behaviour more noticeable and, in some places, long lasting.⁷⁷ It is symptomatic of the relative indifference of the capital to the cause that the Proclamation Society itself, though London-based, preferred to restrict itself to legal and legislative matters, only belatedly (and never systematically) taking on itself the task of active policing set out in its prospectus.⁷⁸

Such specialisation of function and variation in level of commitment was bound to cause tensions even in so decentralised an organisation as the Proclamation Society. 'I believe you are well acquainted with the Constitution and Temper of our London Society', wrote Wilberforce to William Hey in 1792. 'Can you suggest any work for them in the ensuing winter[?] . . . [R]emember however that we [in the London society] are not quite animated with the same spirit which governed yours in the West Riding', he added defensively.⁷⁹

Part of the challenge to sponsors of schemes of national regeneration was, therefore, to tap the energies of increasingly self-confident provincial administrative elites without giving the impression of wanting to control local initiative. It was clear to any practising politician that the most reliable means of mobilising respectable opinion was through existing channels such as quarter sessions.⁸⁰ It was equally clear that the localities with a strongly developed sense of community identity would be the localities most easy to mobilise, as long as their sense of independent identity was respected.

Yorkshire moral reform activism, therefore, was no accident. Yorkshire possessed the most remarkable sense of regional identity in the whole country, as it had recently confirmed in political terms by the leading part it had taken in

⁷⁶ Hey to Wilberforce, 14 Feb. 1787; c. 46, fos. 72–5, Wilberforce MSS, Bodleian Library, Oxford; Wilberforce to Hey, 29 May 1787, d.15, fos. 1–8 (reprinted in part in Wilberforce, *Life*, i.132–3).

⁷⁷ For the impact in Yorkshire, esp. Leeds, see Fitzwilliam to Zouch, 11 Sept. 1787, WWM, E234/15; Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.163–4; J. Pearson, *The Life of William Hey* (2 vols., 1822), ii.115ff.; Webb, *English Local Government*, xi.154, 156–8; R. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants. The Merchant Community in Leeds 1799–1830* (Manchester, 1971), p. 185. Cf. for London, Webb, *English Local Government*, xi.78–83; for Gloucestershire, E. Moir, *Local Government in Gloucestershire 1775–1800* (Bristol, 1969), p. 143; for Manchester, J. Bohstedt, *Riot and Community Politics in England and Wales 1790–1810* (Cambridge MA, 1983), p. 73.

⁷⁸ *Proclamation Society. Seventh Report* (1795), pp. 20–1.

⁷⁹ Wilberforce to Hey, 6 Nov. 1792, Wilberforce MSS (Bodl.), d.15, fos. 173–8.

⁸⁰ Langford, *Public Life*, p. 405.

Wyvill's County Association movement.⁸¹ Of course, vigorous local traditions had drawbacks as well as advantages for reformers because they invariably implied a local culture highly politicised. Wilberforce, as a supporter of Pitt and an MP in his first term of election for a county still traumatised by the political controversy surrounding Pitt's arrival in office in 1783–4, was fully aware of the suspicion which any organised move of his might arouse.⁸² The measure of his awareness may be found in the pains which he took to present the national proclamation movement as a non-party organisation. The measure of his success may be found in the fact that the society he planned was able to bring together not only Pittites, and Wyvillites pledged to institutional reform (though these formed the majority of first committee members), but also followers of the ex-first minister, Lord North, and even unregenerate Foxite Whigs such as the Revd Henry Zouch. Zouch had been chief publicist for the moral reform resolutions of the West Riding bench in 1786 and 1787; he was also an active electoral agent for Earl Fitzwilliam, the most influential anti-Pittite in Yorkshire.⁸³

Beyond the exploration of regional patterns of mobilisation lies the opportunity to investigate a more intractable aspect of the moral reform movement – the social and occupational composition of its promoters.⁸⁴ And here we begin unavoidably to deal with the careers of individuals. Working across the spectrum of social recognition from the most marginal to the most community-integrated, we find a range of 'status-influenced' activists spread out roughly in three groupings.⁸⁵

First, and perhaps weakest in numbers, there are the self-made men, first-generation recruits to public life and insecurely established claimants to gentlemanly social status. These include the already mentioned William Hey of Leeds (1736–1819), son of a dry salter and a prominent Methodist until, in 1781, he surprised John Wesley and the annual conference by addressing them on the

⁸¹ Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, pp. 167, 228–30.

⁸² '[T]he persons with whom I have concerted my measures are so trusty, temperate, and unobnoxious [to certain suspicions (you will comprehend me)], that I think I am not indulging a vain expectation in persuading myself that something considerable may be done': Wilberforce to Hey, 29 May 1787, Wilberforce MSS (Bodl.), c. 46, fos. 72–5. The phrases between brackets do not appear in the version reproduced in Wilberforce, *Life*, i.133. Wilberforce's caution was justified: cf. speculation on his hidden motives in WWM, E234/15 and 16, 11 and 22 Sept. 1787.

⁸³ Lists of JPs attending the Pontefract (West Riding) quarter sessions in 1786–7 may be found in Glasse, *Narrative*, pp. 17, 20. For Wilberforce's success in attracting Northites and Foxites (Zouch, though not Fitzwilliam), see *Life*, i.137; Webb, *English Local Government*, i.355.

⁸⁴ On eighteenth-century status categories, see P. Corfield, 'Class by Name and Number in 18th-Century Britain', in P. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 101–30.

⁸⁵ Biographical information in the section which follows is drawn from the *DNB* and/or L. Namier and J. Brooke, *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754–1790* (3 vols., 1964), unless otherwise noted.

superior merits of the Established Church in a speech of resignation. For forty years senior surgeon of the Leeds Infirmary, he nevertheless remained an unpredictable figure in local public life and his 'puritan' campaigns undertaken during his two terms as mayor of Leeds (1787–8, 1801–2) rather underlined his fragile relationship with existing local custom and social hierarchies.⁸⁶ London society tolerated angularity rather less than the provinces but it too gave opportunities for the self-made to emerge into public life, as we see in the careers of Proclamation Society committee members William Mainwaring (1735–1821) and Sir Charles Middleton (1726–1813). Mainwaring was the son of an architect-surveyor and seems never to have lived down the taint of 'trade'. As chairman of Middlesex quarter sessions for thirty-five years he also acquired the reputation of a 'fixer' and a political manipulator as well as of a competent 'man of business'.⁸⁷ Middleton, by contrast, rose less contentiously into public view as an apolitical civil servant. After many years as Comptroller of the Navy he was to be created Lord Barham on becoming First Lord of the Admiralty for a brief period in 1805–6, but his origins as the son of a Scots customs officer were rather more obscure than Mainwaring's even if his patronage links with the Dundas family gave some hope of eventual advancement.

Next, and separated from 'trade' by a generation (or at least by a substantial period of grace), we find the Wilberforces of the movement. Wilberforce was never more than a sleeping partner in the family firm, and his Cambridge education and position as a minor landowner gave him strong claims to gentlemanly status. Yet there is no doubt that, in the earlier part of his career especially, Wilberforce felt recurrent unease about the security of his gentlemanly credentials. 'Mine is known to be a commercial family . . . [M]ight not the Squires deem the County of York degraded by having a Merchant for its Representative?' he inquired of his electoral adviser in 1787 when offered a nominal partnership in his grandfather's business.⁸⁸ Wilberforce, in practice, found assimilation to the national political and social elite all too easy, and a temptation which only religious faith could keep under control. Others less magnetic in personality, less able, or perhaps more eager for social recognition, were not to be assimilated so easily, yet these 'aspiring gentry' of the second generation are prominent in the list of enthusiasts for volunteer moral reform activities. Such men as Richard Slater Milnes (1759–1802) in the West Riding, and Robert Raikes (1735–1811) and Sir G. O. Paul (1746–1820) in Gloucestershire – all were freed by the prosperity of their family's commercial and

⁸⁶ Pearson, *Life of William Hey*, ii.93, 189–94; W. G. Rimmer, 'William Hey of Leeds: A Reappraisal', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society (Literary and Historical Section)*, 9 (1961), pp. 187–218, esp. pp. 189–91, 211–12.

⁸⁷ Radzinowicz, *History*, iii.377. Cf. Namier and Brooke, *History of Parliament*, iii.97.

⁸⁸ Wilberforce to Wyvill, 25 July 1787, Wyvill MSS, ZFW 7/2/59/11.

manufacturing businesses for the volunteer works of philanthropy and public administration by which they were to become better known.⁸⁹

Least concerned with the problem of establishing and defending their right to public esteem were those of assured occupation and inherited status transmitted over more than one generation. Some, like William Morton Pitt (1754–1836) or Sir William Dolben (1727–1814), were of archetypal county landowning background, emerging as a matter of course into public life, be it in the form of election to parliament as county member or in the form of supporter and publicist for worthy contemporary causes such as Sunday schools, antislavery and the Proclamation Society. Others emerged from gentrified professional families with solidly established patronage networks of kin. This was the case with the Revd Henry Zouch (1725?–95), West Riding magistrate and protégé of Earl Fitzwilliam, and with the Revd Dr Samuel Glasse (1735–1812), ex-royal chaplain, Middlesex magistrate, prison reformer, Sunday school publicist and medical philanthropist.⁹⁰ On the first committee of the Proclamation Society seven of the fourteen members are clearly drawn from the nobility or the established gentry, another two (perhaps three) have some claim to the status and, of the five remaining, three were associated in the public mind with commerce and two with salaried state employment.⁹¹

The national core of leaders for this moral reform umbrella organisation thus emerge as straddling the divide between established and upwardly mobile, between secure and marginal membership of the late eighteenth-century governing elite, and this in turn suggests that the links between status, social unease and motive for commitment to action may take several routes. The evidence deployed above seems capable of interpretation to indicate the likely outline of at least three routes between status and motive.

In the first place, given the ‘self-help’ nature of the English legal system, property-owners had a recurrent spur to voluntary effort regardless of any moral sensitivities they might possess. Magistrates were particularly inclined to encourage aggrieved parties to do their duty by the community in times of social indiscipline rather than acquiesce in law-breaking, however trivial. But all property-owners had some incentive to curb threats to their property and to preserve respect for authority and the gradations of social rank. In the turbulent conditions of the later decades of the century this was a growing incentive. It required no more than a conventional acceptance of current orthodoxies about

⁸⁹ On the rise of a rentier upper middle class on a national scale in the later eighteenth century, see B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 203–4. For the Milnes family, see Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants*, pp. 96, 132, 231. For the Paul and Raikes families, see Moir, *Local Government in Gloucestershire*, pp. 50–2; B. Rodgers, *Cloak of Charity. Studies in 18th-Century Philanthropy* (1949), ch. 5.

⁹⁰ Cf. Langford, *Public Life*, p. 433, on the status tribulations of Zouch’s father, fifty years before.

⁹¹ Committee list from Wilberforce, *Life*, i.393–4.

crime and an instinct for self-preservation to join one of the societies for the prosecution of felons so popular with local property-owners and community leaders from the 1770s onwards.⁹² Lord Effingham, chairman of the West Riding bench which passed the 1786 resolutions, was also a leading member of the Strafforth and Tickhill Association for Prosecuting Stealers of Horses. The Surrey bench of quarter sessions, which endorsed the need for action in support of the 1787 proclamation, had only the previous year called for a countywide voluntary association to be set up to combat crimes against property.⁹³ Both established authority and 'new wealth' could therefore come together in supporting calls to reactivate a self-help tradition of law enforcement without needing to ponder further.

Yet many did ponder further, and it is here that we may legitimately deduce the existence of some variant of group anxiety – 'psychic strain' perhaps – among moral reformers of recently acquired or precarious social rank. The classic example of new wealth producing leisure, introspection and social activism fuelled by covert admission of social guilt at 'undeserved' fortune is that of John Howard as presented by Michael Ignatieff.⁹⁴ Howard's progression as a first-generation gentleman through a religiously experienced crisis of identity and 'self-disgust', eventually resolved by acceptance of guilt as a 'prisoner of sin' and attempts thereafter to atone for sin through the reclamation of other sinners in the form of a campaign for prison reform, is as convincing an interpretation of the evidence available as any modern historian is likely to achieve on the foundation of eighteenth-century sources. We must, of course, note that Howard's unease about his society had a two-fold basis. He was 'marginal' to gentlemanly society, not only as a man of new wealth and provincial origins but also as a religious Dissenter. Wilberforce and most of his fellow campaigners were not so culturally estranged from prevailing values as this, but it is striking how close a parallel can be drawn between the two processes of engagement. Wilberforce knew more of 'the world' and had experienced more success in it by the time of his conversion than Howard ever did, yet the values (provincial, 'methodist') once absorbed and then, as it were, put into suspension, precipitated even in him, given an opportune combination of circumstances. In Wilberforce's case, as in Howard's, conversion began during travel on a continental tour.⁹⁵ The

⁹² Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 48–50; Innes, 'Politics and Morals', pp. 65–6.

⁹³ D. Philips, 'Good Men to Associate and Bad Men to Conspire: Associations for the Prosecution of Felons in England 1770–1860', in D. Hay and F. Snyder (eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750–1850* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 124–5; Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 48–50, 224–5.

⁹⁴ Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, ch. 3, esp. pp. 47–58. Cf. Ignatieff, 'State, Civil Society and Total Institutions', in S. Cohen and A. Scull (eds.), *Social Control and the State* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 87–8, 94–5, a part retraction of his original argument which does not, however, undercut his original thesis about the social determinants of motive.

⁹⁵ Wilberforce's spiritual crisis is traced in *Life*, i.87ff. For a useful modern analysis, see R. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760–1810* (1975), pp. 171–2.

turbulent public events of the mid-1780s, reflected on at a distance, and in the midst of a foreign culture, produced in him first a sense of unease, then of overwhelming personal inadequacy, shame and guilt, and finally of resolution through engagement in work taken up as an expiation of sin, both personal and corporate. 'I feel sometimes infected with a little of your own anxiety', he confessed to a close friend and later Proclamation Society colleague in a much-quoted letter of August 1785:

I fancy I see storms arising, which, already 'no bigger than a man's hand', will by and by overspread and blacken the whole face of heaven. It is not the confusion of parties, and their quarrelling and battling in the House of Commons which makes me despair of the republic, (if I knew a word half way between 'apprehend for' and 'despair', that would best explain my meaning,) but it is the universal corruption and profligacy of the times, which taking its rise among the rich and luxurious has now extended its baneful influence and spread its destructive poison through the whole body of the people.⁹⁶

Three months later he reported himself 'in a state of the deepest depression, from strong convictions of my guilt'. Shortly thereafter, having glimpsed the possibility of redemption through the acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice, he moved to resolve the matter by devoting himself 'for whatever might be the term of my future life, to the service of my God and Saviour'.⁹⁷ The public form which this 'service' took can, as in Howard's case, be regarded as an attempt to 'restore' social harmony – an attempt to recreate the bonds of a hierarchical yet mutually supportive community which appeared to have been strained to breaking point by the unbridled pursuit of sectional and self-interest. The remedy for this state of social degeneration necessarily involved an acceptance of complicity in 'sin' and an attempt to make reparation on one's own part, and also a call to others to do likewise. It followed that moral leadership could successfully be given only by those with a lively personal faith in the system of 'redemption' offered and a direct commitment to personal dealings with 'fellow sinners' of whatever social rank. Thus, to Wilberforce, it was pointless to attempt manipulation of others' minds by preaching doctrines one did not accept oneself. No 'system' of belief or social authority could be 'kept up, when the imposture is seen through by the higher orders, for the sake of retaining the common people in subjection. A system, if not supported by a real persuasion of its truth, will fall to the ground.'⁹⁸ And, given the common bondage of sin under which all human beings laboured, the task which the moral reformer undertook needed to be approached as an essentially personal act of social reintegration. The impulse to reduce human beings to the analytical level of economic abstraction had always to be resisted:

⁹⁶ Wilberforce to Lord Muncaster, 14 Aug. 1785, reprinted in *Life*, i.82.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, i.88, 381. ⁹⁸ Wilberforce, *Practical View*, pp. 407–8.

The callousness, the narrow and foolish wisdom of servilely acquiescing in Adam Smith's general principles, without allowance for the thousand circumstances which take the case out of the province of that very general principle to which they profess allegiance, is producing effects as mischievous as the most determined and studied cruelty. This is rather too strong, but not much.⁹⁹

The propitiation of conscience and the recovery of self-esteem was thus an insatiable and ever-recurring task. The cynical would say necessarily so, given the unresolved tensions within the social analysis and the inadequacy of the remedies proposed. Only the spiritually strenuous were likely to attempt it.

There was, nonetheless, a confident as well as an agonised aspect to 'social guilt' motives for action – a set of motives which overlapped with more optimistic and secular attitudes to social analysis and gave yet another route into action for enthusiasts. For the call to 'duty' in most cases presupposed that the privileged, once aroused, would be found capable of performance. Here evangelical sensibility found common ground with enlightened professional benevolence, and introspection and uncertainty might plausibly be blended with impatience and self-assurance. The blend was very much a phenomenon of the 1780s and early 90s and it lost much of its appeal in the grimmer and more pessimistic decades which followed the French Revolution. Yet in these earlier years 'moral reform' had considerable attraction to the self-confident – the emerging professionals and 'men of business' who had already cut their political teeth in the campaigns to expose corruption, confusion, waste and inefficiency in public life during the American war years.

'Men of business' made their mark under several guises. Perhaps the most prominent grouping of them was to be found in the magistracy, and notably in the clerical magistracy of the more administratively demanding urban areas. The rise to prominence of the clergy on the county benches of late eighteenth-century England is a well-documented fact. It followed from the economic benefits which the beneficed clergy reaped from rural enclosure and agricultural prosperity, and from the particular interpretation of social duty which the gentry-oriented clergy of the Established Church read into their role.¹⁰⁰ Clerical magistrates, once installed, soon gained a reputation for demanding a more uniform, reliable and strenuous discharge of public duty than most gentry JPs were prepared to attempt. And, as the careers of men like the Revd Henry Zouch and the Revd Dr Glasse (even the great Dr Paley) show, they played a significant part in linking calls for moral reform with initiatives for more predictable and effective public administration.¹⁰¹ The clergy as systematic social administrators also had their allies in other professional and semi-professional

⁹⁹ Wilberforce to Hannah More, [1801], *Life*, ii.387. Cf. Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, pp. 72–98, esp. pp. 75, 97.

¹⁰⁰ Langford, *Public Life*, pp. 410ff. ¹⁰¹ Webb, *English Local Government*, i.352, 355–6.

occupations. The moral reform movement can hardly claim Jeremy Bentham as its own,¹⁰² but the impulse to correct the habits of the undisciplined – and to help the afflicted through manipulation of their social and economic environment – led professional and commercial men to support and experiment with various initiatives in moral reform. The ‘great names’ in the mainstream movement (the conveyancer turned philanthropist, Thomas Bernard, the businessman turned magistrate, Patrick Colquhoun) made their public reputations only in the later 1790s. Yet the earlier years had their professional men of business too – the sort of men prepared to travel to London to discuss reform and the standardisation of the poor law, the vagrancy laws and the prisons. It is interesting to note, besides, how ‘uneasy’ men such as Wilberforce and Raikes reacted to ‘corrupt’, ‘barbarous’ and ‘immoral’ practices in these areas as much because of their ‘irrationality’ and wasteful use of human resources as because of some more spiritualised perception of ‘sin’.¹⁰³ It needs to be stressed, however, that the urge to rational reform of institutions involved a sincere attempt to marry ‘system’ with ‘benevolence’ and was, as such, an urge still heavily paternalist in its underpinning values. We have already noted Wilberforce’s qualms about simplified applications of Adam Smith. This was not merely a personal sensitivity: even vagrants have ‘their feelings’ and are entitled to have their motives evaluated as individuals, warned the case-hardened Henry Zouch, his search for order tempered by his ‘sentimental’ acknowledgement of the need to relate with sympathy to the distress of the unfortunate.¹⁰⁴ This was an attitude widespread among the authority-wielding classes in the 1780s and, though challenged, it persisted. As late as 1802 the tension surfaced amid reforming ranks themselves with a public dispute between Thomas Bernard and William Hey of Leeds. Hey, in his capacity as surgeon, was recruited by West Riding manufacturers to justify the local practice of night labour for child parish apprentices, but his findings met with firm rejection from Bernard for falling far beneath acceptable standards of paternalist community concern.¹⁰⁵ Bernard, like many – probably most – of those members of the metropolitan professional and commercial ranks attracted to ideas of moral reform, clearly preferred to place the claims of social cohesion above those of unfettered free enterprise, thus drawing attention (and not

¹⁰² Note, however, Bentham’s links with the reform elite of the Proclamation Society through prison and poor-law reform contacts: Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.137, 246.

¹⁰³ *Proclamation Society. Statement* (1790); Webb, *English Local Government*, i.555. For ‘rational administration’ strands in the thought of Raikes and Wilberforce, see Rodgers, *Cloak of Charity*, pp. 97–9; duke of Manchester to Wilberforce, 18 Sept. 1787, Wilberforce papers (Duke).

¹⁰⁴ Zouch, *Hints*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor. Reports* (5 vols., 1798–1808), iv.1–22 (appendix). Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 659–60 suggests a favourable initial reception for child factory labour among public commentators but Henriques, *Before the Welfare State*, p. 68, notes the emergence of concern for factory children among Lancashire magistrates as early as 1784.

for the last time) to divisions on these fundamental issues among ‘the middle classes’.

It remains to explore one other variable in the making of the late eighteenth-century moral reformer – that of religion. We have already noted the attraction which evangelical religion exerted over certain social groups but the subject justifies further investigation. One of the distinguishing features of 1780s moral reform initiatives was in fact the remarkably ecumenical nature of their appeal and organisation. Indeed it was possible to participate in them from purely secular motives and calculations. This had not been true of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners. It was not to be true of the Vice Society, the leading moral reform society of the wartime generation which followed. This non-exclusiveness was more eagerly advertised in some areas of the 1780s movement than in others: the Proclamation Society proved less attractive to Dissenters and to ‘enlightened’ secular intellectuals than the prison reform or Sunday school movements, for example, and none of these had the same power to bring together enthusiasts of differing religions and intellectual persuasions as did the early antislavery movement.¹⁰⁶ Yet not even the Proclamation Society imposed tests of religious commitment or orthodoxy on members. And, although its announced goals and targeted recruitment groups were perhaps sufficiently select not to need such tests, the evidence suggests that the leadership tended towards religious liberalism in any case. A large majority of those foundation committee members who held seats as MPs supported attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in 1787 and 1789¹⁰⁷ and a leading aristocratic supporter, the duke of Grafton, actually published a pamphlet to argue that the society’s work would be in vain if it failed to support action to modernise the liturgy and creeds of the Established Church to reconcile the enlightened and example-setting sections of society to it.¹⁰⁸

Yet, as we have seen, the Proclamation Society emerged with the suspicion of ‘puritanism’ still hanging in the air around it – this in spite of all Wilberforce’s efforts to stress the practical and unsectarian nature of its work. And the suspicion was not entirely unfounded. We have noted how careful Wilberforce had been in enlisting a balance of religious (as well as political) opinion to support his plan for a nationally co-ordinated scheme. Those who first came to know of the scheme through the covering letter to magistrates sent by the Secretary of State when circulating the King’s proclamation might easily have been forgiven

¹⁰⁶ Only two of the forty-eight original members of the Proclamation Society came from Dissenting backgrounds (R. S. Milnes and H. Hoghton). Neither was a committee member. For the denominational composition of the early antislavery and Sunday school organisations, see Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, p. 42; Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ I.e., six of eight members (Wilberforce and Dolben forming the minority); G. M. Ditchfield, ‘Debates on the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787–90. The Evidence of the Division Lists’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 1 (1977), pp. 69–81.

¹⁰⁸ Grafton, *Hints, etc . . . by a Layman*, pp. 3, 12ff.

for assuming it a limited secular foray against the post-war crime wave – and so it was for many.¹⁰⁹ Privately, though, Wilberforce was admitting to confidants that he conceived himself to be carrying out part of his pledge to the Almighty, and his precedent for action was, as we have seen, explicitly drawn from late seventeenth-century attempts to purify national morals by volunteer action of the godly.¹¹⁰ The questions therefore arise: Why were Evangelicals like Wilberforce particularly susceptible to the cause, and persevering in it? Why did they choose a path to salvation which led through public engagement rather than otherworldly withdrawal? And what impact did they make on the movements in which they participated? How crucial were their priorities in identifying and defining goals for such groups as the Proclamation Society?

Some clues to Evangelical susceptibility have already been suggested in discussion of the social background from which evangelicalism emerged. The late eighteenth-century conversion experience itself seems to be conditioned by ‘class experience’. But the post-conversion ‘flight into action’ invites more detailed exploration. It is significant here to remind ourselves that we are dealing in many, if not most, cases with a new generation of converts – individuals for whom spiritual rebirth came as a novel experience, more read about than explicitly prepared for and learned through a family-sustained religious culture such as emerged in the following generation.¹¹¹ The most prominent lay Evangelicals of the late eighteenth century had almost all established themselves in a profession or public career before undergoing conversion. The temptations of worldly success thus posed a real dilemma for the newly converted, one over which they agonised and rationalised at length before deciding on various grounds that God had called them to exercise their now consecrated talents through participation rather than withdrawal.

[My] shame is not occasioned by my thinking that I am too studiously diligent in the business of life; on the contrary, I then feel that I am serving God best when from proper motives I am most actively engaged in it.¹¹²

Thus wrote Wilberforce attempting to reassure himself in 1786. Once the call was accepted, of course, it became possible to reinterpret past experiences and present activities alike as aspects of the divine plan and thus providential both for the individual and the wider society.¹¹³ Such patterning of thought goes a long way towards explaining the record of perseverance in action which Evangelicals built up, notably in the campaign to abolish the slave trade but equally in campaigns for moral reform on other fronts.

¹⁰⁹ Radzinowicz, *History*, iii.490–1. ¹¹⁰ Wilberforce, *Life*, i.130–6, 149.

¹¹¹ Cf. D. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (1984), pp. 97ff.

¹¹² Wilberforce, *Life*, i.106. See also *Life*, i.96–7, 187; Wilberforce, *Practical View*, p. 15.

¹¹³ Wilberforce, *Life*, i.383. For the doctrine of ‘particular providences’ see Anstey, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 173–5.

We should beware, all the same, of making the processes of conversion and commitment sound too straightforward or more irreversible than they were perceived to be. In fact, first-generation evangelicals were unrelenting in continued self-appraisal of motive and performance, and the intensity of their commitment to worldly improvement was, among other things, a symptom of the continuing strain which temptation to backslide placed upon them. Conversion for educated and socially active men like Wilberforce was not an instantaneous event in any case, and redemption was always conditional. The moderate Calvinist theology, which most late-century Evangelicals preferred to the predestinarian rigours, exclusions and certainties of 'strict Calvinism', did not guarantee to blot out the memory of past sin or to abolish the possibility of future sin. The most assurance that the individual could hope for in this world was a sanctified life, the evidence for which was perseverance in good works to the point where the commitment became habitual and therefore, to a degree, entrenched.¹¹⁴ In this way, salvation by faith in the redeeming power of Christ's sacrifice came necessarily to require some corroborative effort through attempted 'works'.¹¹⁵

A belief in personal sin and universally fallen human nature requiring sacrificial atonement for its salvation of course put Evangelicals potentially at odds with those social improvers who took a more optimistic view about the potential of human reason, human nature and human institutions. Did this have an impact on the priorities and selection of goals of organisations such as the Proclamation Society? The answer seems to be yes, but not as great an impact as later tensions between these groupings might suggest. In a phrase, Evangelicals were more a part of the broader society of their times than they or it always admitted.¹¹⁶ Even on distinctive issues such as Sunday observance the Evangelical influence, while significant, proves less than decisive as an explanation for commitment. Evangelicals made no secret of their concern to obey scriptural precept, and enforce obedience on others, as their repeated attempts to modernise seventeenth-century legislation during the 1780s and 90s bore witness.

A Sunday 'profaned' by trade, secular amusement or public disorder was a hindrance to true believers, a breach of the fourth commandment and a scandal capable of bringing down God's wrath on a heedless and disobedient people.¹¹⁷ But, then, so it was (in perhaps a more mediated and secularised sense) to

¹¹⁴ E.g., Wilberforce, *Life*, i.381, and ii.81–2. Cf. Rosman, *Evangelicals*, pp. 11–12, 58–9; Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, pp. 8–9; P. Nockles, 'Church Parties in the Pre-Tractarian Church', in Walsh *et al.*, *Church of England*, pp. 342ff.

¹¹⁵ Charles Simeon, quoted in E. Jay (ed.), *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 24, 31.

¹¹⁶ D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989), pp. 57–60; Rosman, *Evangelicals*, pp. 7, 43.

¹¹⁷ E.g., Wilberforce to Hey, 6 Nov. 1792, Wilberforce MSS (Bodl.), d. 15, fos. 173–8.

many orthodox Christians and upholders of traditional values in an unruly and custom-eroding age. 'Having shaken off a due respect for the worship of God the restraint of human laws soon [loses] its force', warned Dr Glasse.¹¹⁸ Sunday observance was a touchstone of moral continuity and community-endorsed stability in an urbanising and commercially active society. It stood as a cultural symbol to defenders of traditional authority and evangelicals alike. Thus it was that Wilberforce admitted that it was easier to perceive Sunday as a glimpse of the eternal life to come when it was spent in the country.¹¹⁹ And thus it was that the vision of a secularised urban Sunday – when conditioned by the practicalities of exposure to popular urban pastimes on the one day of 'rest' available to working people – linked evangelicals with industrial employers, urban authorities and property-owners in general in a rhetoric of cultural polarisation. 'Ah, sir', exclaimed the woman whose 1780 reports of the behaviour of child pin-factory workers in Gloucester turned Robert Raikes to the Sunday school solution for crime and disorder,

[C]ould you take a view of this part of the town on a Sunday, you would be shocked indeed; for then the street is filled with multitudes of these wretches who, released that day from employment, spend their time in noise and riot, playing at 'chuck' and cursing and swearing in a manner so horrid as to convey to any serious mind an idea of hell, rather than any other place.¹²⁰

These were action-provoking words. But what sort of action was required? How could crime, dissipation, disorder and disrespect be contained? This was a problem to which both religious and secularised minds devoted much earnest and puzzled attention.

Assisting the magistrate: reform from above and its limits

As we shall see in the course of this study, reformers of morals face a variety of choices, not all of them simultaneously compatible, when they come to questions of ways and means. At very least they face the choice between acting to regulate outward behaviour and acting to change inner disposition – coercion versus education. Usually, too, they face a further choice between concentrating their efforts on changing the individual or else on modifying the environment in which that individual is likely to act. And, of course, these choices themselves may combine or overlap to produce mutant results of varying degrees of effectiveness, consistency and predictability. As a generalisation, the more

¹¹⁸ Glasse, *Narrative*, p. 9. See also pp. 24, 26 for 1787 resolutions of the grand juries of the City of London and of Middlesex deploring 'disregard of the Sabbath (which we conceive to be a principal Cause of the growing Vices of the Times)', and cf. Zouch, *Hints*, pp. 16–17.

¹¹⁹ Wilberforce to his sister, 16 April 1786, in *Life*, i.110–12.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Wadsworth, 'First Manchester Sunday Schools', pp. 102–3.

thoughtful of the activists of the 1780s and early 90s were aware of these dimensions to their work. A group aiming to operate from within existing institutions and social hierarchies, and to tap the prestige attached, was bound, however, to veer naturally to the view that most good could be done most quickly by using the law to modify the behaviour of individuals. 'I know that by regulating the external conduct we do not at first change the Hearts of Men', admitted Wilberforce to a doubtful correspondent, 'but even they are ultimately to be wrought upon by these means, and we should at least so far remove the obtrusiveness of the Temptation that it may not provoke and call forth the appetite which might otherwise lie dormant and inactive.'¹²¹ The prospectus of the Proclamation Society therefore set out as its overriding objective the encouragement of citizens to engage in 'the effectual prosecution and punishment of such criminal and disorderly practices as are within the reach of the law'. It also demanded a pledge from its members to assist magistrates 'in the discharge of their duty'.¹²²

Yet even in its least contentious guise the appeal to law brought with it some dilemmas and embarrassments, some unresolved issues. One such issue was the competence and reliability of the authority-wielding classes themselves. Another was the impact which attempts to extend the reach of impersonal, 'legal' modes of conflict-resolution might be expected to make in a hitherto less formally regulated society. And a third, related, issue raised the question of what to do with those sections of the population now formally stigmatised as 'deviant' or else believed to be at particular risk.

Something has already been said about the pace-setting activities of reforming magistrates such as Zouch and Paul, Mainwaring and Glasse – their attempts to increase the efficiency of public administration and to professionalise the role of public authorities. Their reliance on 'respectable' or 'leading inhabitants' of their communities has also been mentioned. The practical extent of that reliance needs now to be spelled out. Given the expectation which the late eighteenth- (and indeed nineteenth-) century legal system placed on the victim of a criminal offence to right the wrong done, it becomes clear why moral reformers felt the need to supplement official and individual action. As publicists pointed out, the system worked erratically enough when personal injury was the spur to action: in cases where public morals were at issue 'the mischief done' might well be 'greater' yet the damage to each victim was likely to be 'so fractional' that an individual would seldom have the incentive 'to take up the cause of virtue'.¹²³ In this situation it fell on public-spirited yet 'gentlemanly' groups of 'leading

¹²¹ Wilberforce to Wyvill, 25 July 1787, Wyvill MSS, ZFW 7/2/59/11, reprinted in edited form in Wilberforce, *Life*, i.131.

¹²² Wilberforce, *Life*, i.393.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, i.131–2. Cf. Paley, *Principles*, p. 233; *Proclamation Society. Report for 1799*, pp. 4–6; and see generally C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in England 1750–1900* (1987; 2nd edn, 1996), pp. 138–48.

inhabitants' to collect evidence, underwrite the time and expense of enforcement proceedings and reward conscientious discharge of duty by public officers of lesser rank.¹²⁴ Such individual or collective action, however, carried risks of its own. How, for example, to avoid being undercut at crucial moments by less competent, less conscientious or more tradition-bound authorities than oneself? As provincial enthusiasts such as William Hey found to their cost, the law became a broken reed when prosecutors were dismissed as moral busybodies by unsympathetic judges concerned by the social implications of reviving the enforcement of 'obsolete' statutes.¹²⁵ The situation was made even more difficult when defendants were able to point to comparably unregenerate behaviour among the law-enforcing classes themselves and to activities tacitly endorsed by their patronage. Caught in a dilemma of their own making – not wishing to criticise those whose authority they wished in general to promote – reformers were reduced to a rhetoric of demand that 'the Great' set an example which impressionable social inferiors might safely follow.¹²⁶ Socially skilled leaders of the Proclamation Society such as Wilberforce and Bishop Porteus accepted the futility of denunciation of fashionable society as a policy, and the irrelevance of formal prosecution as a weapon in such cases.¹²⁷ The most that could reasonably be attempted with uncommitted members of the polite world was to shame or cajole – hardly yet alarm – them into a sense of the symbolic indignity of their position as Sabbath-breakers, patrons of barbarous and desensitising public spectacles and pastimes, and so on.¹²⁸ Given the continuing preoccupation of the authority-exercising classes to 'keep up appearances' in the still relatively intimate 'theatre' of mid-Georgian social relations, this approach had perhaps more potential bite than later critics have been prepared to concede.¹²⁹

Example-setting of a more ferocious sort was, as we know, still very much part of the repertoire of the mid-Georgian upper ranks when they turned their attention to the problem of bringing discipline to the lower orders. And, once again, it is important to spell out how far reliance on this tried and trusted approach extended. While there has been lively debate in recent times about the extent to which enforcement of the criminal law may be interpreted as a 'hegemonic' activity engaged in by a definable 'ruling class', the actual scale of enforcement proceeding has been generally acknowledged to be – by later standards – extraordinarily small. (In 1805, for example, the first year for which

¹²⁴ Zouch, *Hints*, pp. 2–4; Glasse, *Narrative*, pp. 40, 47.

¹²⁵ Pearson, *Life of William Hey*, ii.120. See also Hey to Wilberforce, 14 Feb. 1787, Wilberforce MSS (Bodl.), d. 15, fos. 1–8, for a glimpse of the procedural obstacles which unfriendly judges might put in the way of 'over-eager' prosecutors.

¹²⁶ Zouch, *Hints*, p. 16; Glasse, *Narrative*, pp. 45–6; Grafton, *Hints*, pp. 37–9; Wilberforce, *Practical View*, pp. 372, 416.

¹²⁷ R. Hodgson, *Life of Bishop Porteus* (1811), pp. 138–42; Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.272.

¹²⁸ Grafton, *Hints*, p. 37; *Proclamation Society. Seventh Report* (1795), p. 13.

¹²⁹ E.g., F. K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians. The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 84.

national figures are available, a total of 4,605 individuals were committed to stand trial for indictable offences. By 1842 the figure had risen to more than 31,000.¹³⁰) It is also apparent that eighteenth-century selectivity was based at least as much on reluctance to resort to law as on inability to enforce, with prosecution and formal punishments being reserved as weapons of last resort to be applied chiefly to those judged least likely to reintegrate successfully into the communities which had 'delivered them up' for judgement.¹³¹ That is, authorities and community opinion-formers often reached the view that social harmony could best be preserved/restored, not by the further tearing of the fabric of community relations brought about by legal intervention, but by some act of compromise, contrition or reparation carried out under the active or tacit sanction of local opinion. Conviction and punishment of formally stigmatised offenders, therefore, was to be restricted in application and rationalised as appropriate rather for its supposed deterrent effect on others subject to similar temptations than for any retributive or corrective effect which it might have on offenders themselves. Of course this rationalisation, based as it was on social preference, became increasingly exposed to attack from those who set forward certainty of apprehension combined with impersonal application of graded punishments as principles better calculated to secure good order in a more urban and commercially oriented society.¹³²

Given the eagerness of Proclamation Society leaders and their allies to advertise their commitment to law enforcement and the cause of prison reform, it seems natural to line them up with those who accepted the new world of conformity and certainty – who worked actively to reject the old regime of selective exemplary deterrence. But how does the evidence fall? There are several distinctions worth drawing here. In matters of prosecution, for example, it is probable that Proclamation Society leaders were more willing to prosecute, and for a wider range of activities, than had hitherto been the case. We have seen that this was certainly the perception of their early libertarian opponents. It was a perception which strengthened in the course of the 1790s, most notably because of the string of (generally unsuccessful) bills to extend Sunday trading restrictions, and of (usually successful) prosecutions for blasphemous and obscene libel, which members of the society sponsored in this decade.¹³³ This perception was not, however, one which most activists recognised as fairly representing their motives and aims. As they saw it, the state had always intended its enacted laws

¹³⁰ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, pp. 29ff.; V. Gatrell and T. Hadden, 'Criminal Statistics and their Interpretation', in E. A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Society. Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 352, 373, 392–3.

¹³¹ Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 35–40, 448–9, 624; King, 'Decision-Makers', pp. 27, 40–2, 48.

¹³² Paley, *Principles*, pp. 526ff., but cf. p. 549, and see Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 543–4, 627ff.

¹³³ For Sunday observance activities, see Radzinowicz, *History*, iii.186–8, and commented on from the perspective of sponsors in Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.48, 338; *Proclamation Society. Seventh Report* (1795), pp. 6–7; and *Report for 1799*, p. 17. For libel prosecutions, see note 141 below.

to be enforced in some form. It was just that the atrophy of the powers of Church and state since the late seventeenth century had left a vacuum – a vacuum which public-spirited citizens had an obligation to fill as best they could. After all, it had been the conventional view of public authorities for generations that greater crimes bred naturally out of uncurbed minor excess. Laws regulating manners and morals therefore retained a widely valued social purpose – that of warning minor offenders against community standards that they stood, like Hogarth's idle apprentice, at the start of a slippery slope of temptation to self-indulgence and loss of self-control.¹³⁴ It might be necessary in certain respects to update laws to make them applicable to modern infringements of ancient principle. The more pious might have private fantasies of an even more primitive godly commonwealth. But the professed object of public association was still 'not to stretch the laws beyond their ancient limits, though this would be highly advisable, but only to render effectual the law at present existing'.¹³⁵

Similarly conventional reasoning lay behind plans to encourage more 'effectual prosecution' of offenders. In spite of isolated campaigns of apparently blanket law enforcement against all infringers (notably Hey's 1787–8 effort at Leeds), the London leaders of the Proclamation Society appear still to have accepted the view that well-publicised example-setting was a reliable and adequate mode of operation. Such was their faith indeed that repeated demonstrations of its inadequacy as a solution to the problem of the metropolitan trade in indecent literature during the 1790s seems never to have dented their belief that one conclusive court victory would sooner or later settle the matter.¹³⁶ To gain such court victories, however, money had to be available and both legal expertise and gentlemanly effort harnessed to the cause. That is, the task was to be defined once again in practical terms as one of plugging the gaps – of making the existing system work to the desired ends of the society and its supporters rather than one of articulating (let alone promoting) a general challenge to that system.¹³⁷ Chief among the practical problems which users of the system had to face was the problem of gathering and presenting evidence which would stand up in court. The decades around 1800 were indeed particularly hazardous ones for witnesses. On the one hand the spread of the reward system as an inducement to citizens and petty public officers to take action against offenders also came to act as an inducement to vexatious litigation, collusion and perjury. On the other hand the increasing presence of defence lawyers (at least in proceedings before judge and jury) helped to ensure that the evidence

¹³⁴ Glasse, *Narrative*, p. 9; Wilberforce, *Life*, i.131–2; Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 421–2.

¹³⁵ Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.424. See also Wilberforce to William Hey, 6 Nov. 1792, Wilberforce MSS (Bodl.), d. 15, fo. 173.

¹³⁶ *Proclamation Society: Reports for 1799*, p. 12; *for 1800*, p. 4; *for 1802*, p. 6.

¹³⁷ Cf. Phillips, 'Associations for the Prosecution of Felons', pp. 127–32.

of ‘informers’ attracted almost automatic suspicion.¹³⁸ To mount a reliable case prosecutors needed increasingly to resort to legal representation themselves and to present a case confirmed by witnesses whose motives for giving evidence were not tainted by sectarian fanaticism or hope of gain. The ideal witness was the honour-bound gentleman: thus, in great part, the concern of moral reform publicists to rouse informers of ‘fortune, character and influence’,

thereby removing, as much as possible, that odium which bad men find it their interest to affix to the character of informers; and which indeed is odious, when it is assumed for the purpose of gratifying a malignant, or self-interested disposition; but highly respectable, when assumed for the purpose of promoting peace and regularity.¹³⁹

The strains associated with the ‘legalisation’ of social relations surface plainly enough within such tortuous and value-laden justifications as these. They were not absent either from the dilemmas which reformers faced after securing a conviction. Pushing a charge to conviction and, especially, intervening in submission about appropriate punishments both presented significant opportunities for prosecutors to consolidate their position as upholders of community values, rather than risk condemnation as sectarian or overbearing disrupters. Here evidence of activists’ attitudes runs thinner than one would like. The best-documented example of discussions on the policy of extending ‘mercy’ to convicted offenders comes from the later 1790s at a time when wartime fear of foreign invasion and domestic subversion was near its peak: this must undercut any general claim on behalf of its typicality. The case is nevertheless worth citing to reveal how deeply the ‘old’ values and assumptions permeated the thinking of leaders of the society. At the centre of the controversy stood Thomas Williams, convicted in 1797 on Proclamation Society evidence for the blasphemous libel of publishing Tom Paine’s attack on institutional Christianity, *The Age of Reason*. The society had employed the brilliant Whig barrister (and ‘reputed unbeliever’), Thomas Erskine, to present its case. Having won, Erskine suggested that the cause might best be consolidated by a well-publicised plea for mercy in sentencing:

Mercy being the grand characteristic of the Christian religion which had been defamed and insulted, it might be here exercised not only safely, but more usefully to the object of the prosecution, than by the most severe judgment.¹⁴⁰

To complicate matters, there was some doubt about the sincerity of Williams’s contrition for his act, public expression of which was an essential precondition to

¹³⁸ Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 50, 362, 374; Radzinowicz, *History*, ii.142–52.

¹³⁹ Glasse, *Narrative*, p. 47. See also p. 49, and cf. Paley, *Principles*, p. 233; *Proclamation Society Report for 1799*, pp. 6–8.

¹⁴⁰ T. Howell (ed.), *State Trials* (33 vols., 1809–26), xxvi.716–17. See also *Morning Chronicle*, 30 April 1798, cited in M. Thale (ed.), *The Autobiography of Francis Place (1771–1854)* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 167, n. 1.

the ritual tempering of ‘justice’ by ‘mercy’. The committee of the Proclamation Society seem, however, to have known nothing of this. When they came to consider Erskine’s argument, however, they still could not – as they had done in less ideologically charged cases – bring themselves to ‘express a wish for lenity’. Erskine resigned his brief. Punishment was left to the discretion of the court and Williams received a sentence of example-setting severity.¹⁴¹

That sentence, nevertheless, did not – as it might have done – include exposure to public gaze (for example, in the pillory) as part of its purging of social disharmony. (Williams was given a prison term and required to enter into a £1,000 bond of recognisance to be of good behaviour ‘for life’.) This was no doubt to the prosecutors’ approval for, in matters of punishment at least, Proclamation Society members may fairly be lined up on the innovating side of the law-reform ledger. Whether because of fears of the social unreliability of London crowds, whether because of distaste for the ‘cruel and degrading spectacle’ of state-sponsored physical punishment, volunteer supporters of the magistracy were as unlikely to approve of the pillory as of the sickening overuse of the gallows.¹⁴² Their hopes instead were more likely to be pinned on the reformative potential of the prison. This was particularly true of the early years of the Proclamation Society. By the early 1790s the society had established a vigorous system for the inspection of metropolitan and county gaols. Making use of their social rank and (if magistrates) of their statutory rights of inspection, society members and correspondents eagerly set out to propagandise on behalf of the Howardian reformatory ideal and to test the degree to which each institution met it. Were inmates segregated against moral contamination from each other and from the outside world? Were they subject to regular discipline and the opportunity to acquire occupational skills and habits of industry? Were they encouraged to reflect on their position and to cultivate conscience? Like the prison reform movement as a whole, the Proclamation Society branch of it lost impetus in the course of the 1790s: the expense of reform became increasingly apparent and, with it, those tensions, always implicit, now explicit, between ‘Benthamite’ labour disciplinarians and Howardian savers of sinful souls.¹⁴³ But it is reasonable to deduce that, in this field, self-styled moral reformers had been committed innovators from the beginning.

Furthermore, such people seldom remained content with projects for prison reform alone but tended to develop an ‘experimental’ interest in plans for the preventive education of high-risk potential transgressors as well. Robert Raikes,

¹⁴¹ Howell, *State Trials*, xxvi.713–14; Thale, *Francis Place*, pp. 159–72; Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.251, 279. Cf. *Proclamation Society. Seventh Report* (1795), pp. 15–16; and see generally D. Hay, ‘Property, Authority and the Criminal Law’, in Hay *et al.* (eds.), *Albion’s Fatal Tree* (1975), pp. 17–63.

¹⁴² Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 614–16; Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 20–4, 88–90.

¹⁴³ Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 103–7, 112–15.

we know, came to Sunday schools from this direction. Others carried the idea of programmed character formation even further – most notably the founders, in 1788, of the Philanthropic Society ‘for the Promotion of Industry, and the Reform of the Criminal Poor’. Whereas Sunday schools were usually set up as community-sponsored attempts to supplement the perceived incapacity of families of the labouring classes to mould the minds, souls and manners of their children, the Philanthropic Society was set up with the aim of actively disrupting the family socialisation process as it applied to ‘the offspring of the vicious and dishonest’ London poor.¹⁴⁴ Children of this class, ‘selected’ with the help of clergy and magistrates, were to be removed to an institution supervised and part-financed by volunteer patrons, there to be ‘allured [sic] from their evil habits and connections by peculiar advantages, and peculiarly good treatment’. (This meant in practice the learning of a trade for boys and preparation for ‘menial service’ for girls.¹⁴⁵)

The Philanthropic Society’s work was very much a pilot scheme: there were no more than seventy-six children in care in 1791. Its proclaimed objective – ‘to unite the purposes of charity with those of industry and police’ – also alerts us to another of its innovations – the recruitment of system-seeking reformers to its management.¹⁴⁶ But the society’s chief interest for us at this point in the argument is the insight which its literature gives into the intellectual assumptions of late-century moral reformers in general – the way in which they expected their work to take effect. The expectation could be given most confident expression in relation to work undertaken with children: ‘Childhood is a season admirably calculated for the reception of virtuous impressions. The mind is tender and flexible. The disposition is moulded entirely by education. The character is not yet formed.’¹⁴⁷ Yet the associationist psychological assumptions underpinning such judgements gave hope of an approach, in principle, to the formation of character at later stages of the life cycle as well. The premise was that moral sentiments were not an innate human characteristic but responses learned by each individual through the habitual associations of experience: it was a premise so fruitful in possibilities that it had become, by the later decades of the century,

¹⁴⁴ The regulations of the Society defined its targeted clients as ‘necessitous children . . . selected from the offspring of convicts, or from such children as are engaged in criminal, disorderly, or vagrant courses of life’: *Philanthropic Society. An Address to the Public* (1791), p. 15. The society carefully distinguished its goal of reclaiming ‘the offspring of the vicious and dishonest’ from the merely charitable attempts of previous institution-builders to provide for ‘the deserving but unfortunate part of the community’: *Address*, p. 5, and see I. Pinchbeck and M. Hewitt, *Children in English Society* (2 vols., 1973), ii.419–30.

¹⁴⁵ *Philanthropic Society. Address*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3. Three of the institution’s eight vice-presidents in 1791 were Proclamation Society members: *ibid.*, p. 2. The social origins and charitable connections of early committee members (who included Jeremy Bentham’s father) are explored in detail in Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, p. 186.

¹⁴⁷ *Philanthropic Society. Address*, p. 11, and cf. pp. 25–30.

the ruling orthodoxy among educated minds of scientific inclination.¹⁴⁸ As befitted an insight first set out by Locke and further refined by the ‘materialist’ philosophers Hume and Hartley, it was not a belief endorsed unreservedly by those still committed to viewing the world in theological terms. Evangelicals in particular could not accept the way in which it might be developed to displace original sin from the explanation of human behaviour. We have seen, nonetheless, that evangelicals were not immune from their intellectual environment – Wilberforce justifying the regulation of ‘external conduct’ to modify habit and demanding that the socially influential set an example for emulation. And, if evangelicals were prepared to make selective use of the practical possibilities, proto-utilitarian spokesmen for natural theology such as Paley found the idea of training in habit-formation no more than common sense.¹⁴⁹

How far believers in original sin or in secular self-improvement were prepared to push any ‘technology of salvation’ which might be built on such psychological foundations is, of course, a separate question, and a controversial one. Ever since the incursions of Michel Foucault across the territory historians have felt bound at least to consider as a possibility the prospect that ‘enlightened reformers’ were indeed prepared to push their ‘expertise’ to all but totalitarian limits, given the opportunity. Historians, however, have been hesitant in accepting that an ‘age of confinement’ is a valid description of English institutional developments during the later eighteenth century. Most have doubted that (the hapless Bentham apart) the approach helps to pin down the complexity of reformist intention either.¹⁵⁰ Where do the activists of the Proclamation Society network stand on the issue? Some of them may certainly be classified among the more extreme advocates of the possibilities of moral reclamation through institutional segregation and socialisation. The Proclamation Society’s sub-committee on prisons, for example, noted with especial approval in 1790 the record of one gaol in Norfolk which was alleged not only to be returning a profit from the labour of inmates being instructed in a trade but to be returning the added dividend of a remarkable upsurge in confessions from prisoners kept in solitary confinement: ‘Their minds, tortured with guilt, and unrelieved by the avocations of society, seem to feel no ease but in discharging the load from off them.’¹⁵¹ And, at the advance fringes of the movement, in the Philanthropic Society, we see the beginnings of a systematic ‘scientific’ attempt to identify in advance likely recruits to a criminal or vicious class – a straw in the wind

¹⁴⁸ Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, ch. 3, esp. pp. 56, 60, 66–7, 71; R. Porter, *Mind-Forg’d Manacles. A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (1987), pp. 188–9, 192.

¹⁴⁹ Wilberforce, *Practical View*, pp. 14, 26, 379, and cf. pp. 436ff. for discussion on the nature and limits of childhood innocence; Paley, *Principles*, pp. 14, 37, though cf. pp. 544–6 for pessimistic views on the possibility of reclaiming adult offenders.

¹⁵⁰ Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, p. 14, but cf. Ignatieff, ‘State, Civil Society and Total Institutions’, pp. 92–5; S. Nash, ‘Prostitution and Charity: The Magdalen Hospital, A Case Study’, *Journal of Social History*, 17 (1984), pp. 617–28 at pp. 622–5; Porter, *Mind-Forg’d Manacles*, pp. 155ff.

¹⁵¹ *Proclamation Society. Report of the Sub-Committee respecting . . . Prisons*, pp. 12–14.

suggesting that some among the educated elite were preparing to recognise deviant behaviour as a characteristic of whole groups rather than of random individual members of a sin-afflicted humanity.¹⁵²

Yet in overall perspective how much is to be read into such examples? There is no predicting what a following generation may build on foundations laid in hope, enthusiastic naivety and ignorance of the future. Experimenters with the new methods of moral reclamation were prepared to demand, by previous standards, an unusual degree of control over the ‘minds and souls’ of those they selected for attention. They had already found out by the mid-1790s, however, that it would be a long and far from certain task to convince state authorities and local ratepayers of the benefits of underwriting investment in the building and running of a uniform set of new institutions.¹⁵³ What they seem not to have realised – though differences of approach within their own ranks might have given some warning – was the intractable and long-term nature of the task they had set themselves. Thus plans for easing the passage of released prisoners back into a supposedly ‘law-abiding community’ and plans to adjust the prison term itself to evidence of ‘good behaviour’ were schemes enthusiastically canvassed – not on the assumption that they would prolong institutional custody or post-custodial surveillance, but that they would have a swift and permanent effect in modifying behaviour and values.¹⁵⁴ Above all, what reformers had not yet conceded – indeed, had as yet barely glimpsed – was the problem of ‘controlling the guardians’ – the people entrusted with the day-to-day implementation of their schemes of moral reclamation.¹⁵⁵ This was a problem which was to pose itself in ever more acute form in the large, depersonalised institutions which a later age developed in selective adaptation of earlier ideals. It was maybe the relatively limited size of the institutions which had been set up by this earlier period which encouraged this blind spot among enthusiasts. More likely, it was a residual sense of paternalist and/or evangelical obligation to social dependants and fellow sinners which it seemed impossible, and undesirable, to delegate.¹⁵⁶ Certainly the reformers we meet in the ranks of the Proclamation Society were gentlemen of public standing in their own right,

¹⁵² Cf. Beattie, *Crime*, pp. 251–2, 629–30; Emsley, *Crime and Society*, pp. 129–33.

¹⁵³ Ignatieff, ‘State, Civil Society and Total Institutions’, pp. 82–3, 94–5.

¹⁵⁴ *Proclamation Society. Statement* (1790), pp. 23–5; *Philanthropic Society. Address*, p. 6; *Bettering Society. Reports*, ii.98–9.

¹⁵⁵ The first major prison discipline scandal broke only in 1798 with allegations made against the regime of Governor Aris at Coldbath Fields prison. Wilberforce, briefed by Dr Glasse (one of the visiting magistrates as well as a Proclamation Society colleague), at first ridiculed the allegations in parliament but they were partly substantiated by an official inquiry in 1800: Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 131–9; Innes, ‘Politics and Morals’, pp. 117–18.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 211–15. Coldbath Fields was completed in 1794 to house 232 inmates, approximately one-eighth of the number Bentham considered the optimum intake for an economically run prison of his own design. Cf., however, plans made (and sometimes implemented) during the 1770s and 80s for workhouses of up to 1,000 capacity: A. Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (1978), ch. 3, esp. pp. 48–9; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, p. 152.

not self-proclaimed experts with a careerist interest in institutional growth. Nor were they the last generation to approach their task from this perspective: later chapters will record the cycles of doubt and dissatisfaction through which they and their successors regularly passed as they struggled to reconcile moral ends with bureaucratic or entrepreneurial means.

From any perspective later than that of the mid-1790s, it might be argued, the anxieties and activities of the moral reform enthusiasts we have explored here are cast into shadow by the more doctrinaire, more extended – more publicised, criticised and generally spectacular – initiatives of the age which followed. Yet it is clear that ‘moral decay’ was a lively and established issue in English public debate well before the French Revolution fanned the fires of concern. On the evidence sampled here the key figures to register a sense of increasing moral strain in their society were located among recent recruits to the eighteenth-century administrative elite – figures drawn from family dynasties of the prospering sections of the commercial and professional classes. In most circumstances they could count on the support and co-operation of individuals from the more ‘conscientious’ sections of the hereditary landed classes as well. The bonding of recruits from these two groups in a moral reform alliance is a significant sign of the period because it indicates the way in which, for the first time since the later Stuart era, the formation of morals and manners was becoming a contentious issue on a plausibly national scale. London, it was true, and intermittently other provincial centres, had been giving cause for alarm at least since the dismantling of royal and ecclesiastical power in the later seventeenth century. But now the growth of a larger – and to a degree more mobile – population combined with the emergence of increasingly market-moulded patterns of work and consumption to jolt the sensibilities of ‘men of business’ and public aspiration across most localities with any sense of corporate identity. The methods and objectives of the associations which they formed were in keeping with their view of a well-ordered society. Existing public authorities and institutions were to be treated with scrupulous respect. The charges of sectarian fanaticism and venal self-interest which past critics had levelled against previous volunteers in the cause were to be noted – and avoided. Activities were to be conducted by a self-selecting elite of reliably gentleman-like values. The dilemma of reconciling present need with past record was to be met by a policy of moderate yet committed action: the refurbishment of the existing machinery for the enforcement of moral and social discipline on the one hand, experiment with locally sponsored pilot schemes of preventive socialisation on the other.

2 'The best means of national safety': moral reform in wartime, 1795–1815

There can be no doubt that the era of the French wars marked as decisive a phase in debate about national morals as it did in debate about political rights or, for that matter, about the nature of human society itself. Prolonged experience of war, it may be argued, has a potentially dual impact on the perception and definition of morals. On the one hand, the economic and social confusions and uprootings which accompany war may act as a solvent on existing values and standards of behaviour. On the other hand, war may act as a generator of social cohesion. The stimulus of facing a clearly defined enemy may encourage, at the least, the expression of atavistic fears and passions – at the most, an attempt to impose disciplines of ideologically based conformity with virtually unlimited social reach.

Dimensions of wartime moral anxiety

English society during the French wars showed signs of reacting in both these ways. The war which began in February 1793 was an inescapable experience for a whole generation. Its impacts were both material and ideological. On the level of material life the demands which war placed on resources were unprecedented and the degree of mobilisation achieved has been compared with that of World War I.¹ The most direct impact was that made on the lives of those one in six men who, at the height of mobilisation, were serving in the regular army, in the militia or in the various volunteer forces raised for home defence. Their hardships and sacrifices were, from time to time, extreme and duly recognised as such by those who stayed behind. But the opportunity presented them by joining up and moving out of the circle of known relationships and defined responsibilities was one which also weighed on many minds:

[N]ecessary as it is for you to assume the Military Character, for the Defence of your King and Country, it is not necessary for that Purpose that you should neglect your domestic Duties . . . On the contrary, by continuing to be good Husbands, Fathers, and Sons, you will be most likely to become good Soldiers, for you will thereby best preserve

¹ C. Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars 1793–1815* (1979), pp. 1–4, 133, 169–70.

that Health of Body, and that Vigour of Mind, which . . . were never of such Importance as at the present Moment.²

And joining up was only the first link in a chain of moral dislocation. Drink and sexual licence might be the particular failings of the serving soldier but the strains which the fluctuations of the wartime economy placed on those who remained in civilian life were not to be avoided either. For those employed in occupations serving the war effort, work was steady, wages were high in spite of inflation, and disposable income was plentiful enough to confirm the fears of those moralists who had already located the source of modern depravity in the spreading 'luxury' of market-stimulated consumption patterns among the labouring classes.³ The effect of prosperity on their employers – the aspiration to gentility which this encouraged (especially among master craftsmen, farmers and their wives) – was also a continuing trend which aroused concern among pre-war campaigners for a restoration of the bonds of social deference: 'An increasing evil at Sheffield is, that the apprentices used to live with the master and be of the family; now the wives are grown too fine ladies to like it; they lodge out and are much less orderly.'⁴ Those thrown out of work by the involuntary loss of foreign markets or by the effects of enemy or government economic policy, and those not strongly enough placed to protect their wage levels against the upward surge of basic food prices between 1794 and 1801, became morally problematic for the reverse reason. Traditional wisdom had it that crime waves were to be expected at the end of wars. Yet, as publicists were quick to point out, war, crime and disorder seemed this time round to intertwine. The years of dearth (1795–6, 1799–1801) and of trade depression (1810–12) produced notable crises of public order. More worrying still, at least in the period up to 1801, was the way in which these domestic crises had a way of overlapping with times of threatened invasion and accompanying home-front subversion.⁵

Distress, dissipation and disorder were of course matters which attracted attention and unavoidable concern. They were, nonetheless, problems which fell within the range of the familiar. Wars to capture hearts and subvert minds were not. While the English propertied ranks took some time to gauge the

² *A Friendly Caution to Volunteers* (Society for the Suppression of Vice handbill, c. 1803), Curzon MSS, b.10(25), Bodleian Library, Oxford.

³ Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, p. 618. See also J. Bowles, *Reflections on the Political and Moral State of Society at the Close of the 18th Century* (1800), p. 142; *Society for the Suppression of Vice* [Vice Society]. *Address to the Public, Part the Second* (1803), pp. 48–9.

⁴ Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.164 (diary entry, July 1796). Cf. [Anon], *A Letter to a Member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice: In which its Principles and Proceedings are Examined and Condemned* (1804), p.41; and see generally A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981), ch. 7; K. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor. Social Change and Agrarian England 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 86–8.

⁵ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, pp. 205–6; Emsley, *French Wars*, pp. 65–8, 85–7, 94–5; J. Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England 1700–1870* (1979), pp. 165–80.

attractive power of ‘Jacobin’ ideas over their own lower orders, a majority of them well and truly made up their minds on the seriousness of the threat in the course of the mid and late 1790s. This experience, too, had its impact on the form and content of debate over the state of national morals. In the battle between ‘Jacobin’ and ‘anti-Jacobin’ for the hearts and minds of the wider society, one of the home-side advantages on which anti-Jacobins were able to draw was the ‘natural’ association of patriotic virtue with a superior set of moral values. It is always a tempting tactic in times of national emergency to project onto a foreign screen fears which in less troubled times might be admitted to have their origin closer to home; anti-Jacobins spared no effort during the mid and late 1790s to spread word of the brutality and godless licentiousness of the revolutionary regime in France which Britons were called upon to oppose and, preferably, destroy.⁶ It can have come, therefore, as no surprise to an early nineteenth-century public to learn, among other things, that French prisoners of war in England whiled away their spare time by supplying ‘obscene and blasphemous drawings and toys’ to local traders and hawkers for distribution – ‘a practice which renders our natural enemies more dangerous to us in the character of prisoners, than they could possibly be in the open field’.⁷ But this was rather to give the game away, for it implicitly conceded that there was a ready local market for the product and thus posed the persisting problem of deciding what might be done to strengthen the moral resistance of local populations to the disguised poisons now within their reach.

The antidotes which loyalists prescribed certainly helped to encourage would-be moral activists in several new directions. For a start, defenders of traditional authorities were now urged to reconsider their attitude towards the ‘principle’ of extended voluntary association. Organisations of a type which had previously been suspect as fronts for ‘ignorant enthusiasm’ or ‘insinuations’ on the competence of officials in Church and state became acceptable auxiliaries in time of crisis. The most direct applications of the idea might be military, but Burke’s dictum, ‘When bad men combine, the good must associate’, struck a responsive chord – first in explicitly ideological groupings such as the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, but eventually in more culturally defined alliances, notably the Society for the Suppression of Vice.⁸ The rhetoric in use among such groups was, predictably, much more polarising in its categories and catastrophist in its imagery than

⁶ G. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality. Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York, 1985), p. 6. Cf. A. D. Harvey, *Britain in the Early 19th Century* (1978), ch. 7.

⁷ *Vice Society. Occasional Report*, no. v (1810), p. 4.

⁸ *Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. [Resolutions agreed upon] At a Meeting of Gentlemen at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, November 10, 1792. Cf. Society for the Suppression of Vice. Address to the Public. Part the First* (1803), p. 38. For the spread of the 1790s loyalist movement, see E. de Montluzin, *The Anti-Jacobins 1798–1800* (1988), pp. 6–8.

pre-war society would have thought either prudent or convincing. At its most strident it dealt in predictions of imminent 'last judgements'. As Lord Macaulay (b. 1800) recalled towards the end of his life:

When I was a boy, no human being doubted that Buonaparte was a principal subject of the prophecies of the Old Testament. I was not born when he went to Egypt. But I have heard my father say that the prophets were then wilder than ever he remembered them. They fully expected the battle in the Valley of Jehosaphat and the restoration of the Jews within a year.⁹

This stridency seldom went unchallenged. Indeed, a frayed but unbroken line of criticism pursues the propagandists of the Reform-or-Ruin persuasion throughout the war years, as Whig sceptics and religious rationalists struggle to keep their balance against the tide.¹⁰ There is no doubt, though, that evangelical ways of interpreting experience in terms of estrangement from God and the need actively to seek forgiveness from sin (personal and national) made wide appeal at many social levels.¹¹ Much of its appeal was atavistic in the sense that, in times of crisis, the anxious have a habit of seeking security from the moral perplexities of a disordered universe in demanding a return to the practice of supposedly more primitive or tradition-consecrated customs of which the Old Testament is, in Protestant cultures, a notable repository.¹²

Thus, on one front, there were the wartime flurries of concern about touchstones of orthodoxy such as Sunday observance.¹³ There are signs, too, that war helped enthusiasts to find a platform from which to preach doctrines about proper role behaviour in other areas of social life – though how far these enthusiasts can be accepted as mouthpieces for the expression of a Durkheimian *conscience collective* remains an open question.¹⁴ It is certainly the case that the search for biblical virtue helped to accelerate sympathy among the educated classes for arguments asserting a sacramental view of marriage and a divinely

⁹ T. Pinney (ed.), *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay* (6 vols., Cambridge, 1974–81), vi.252. The restoration of the Jews was an indication that the second coming of Christ was to be expected.

¹⁰ N. C. Smith (ed.), *Selected Letters of Sydney Smith* (Oxford, 1981), p. 14; *Annual Review of History and Literature*, 3 (1805), 225–7; [Anon], *Letter to a Member of the Vice Society*, pp. 11–15.

¹¹ See generally M. J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude* (1965), ch. 4. For discussion of relevant trends in educated Establishment and Dissenting thought, and in popular religious belief during these years see, respectively, Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 4, 10; R. W. Davis, *Dissent in Politics 1780–1830* (1971), pp. 109–10, 168–9, 196 ff.; J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming. Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (1979), pp. 66ff.

¹² Cf. P. Gay, 'On the Bourgeoisie. A Psychological Interpretation', in J. Merriman (ed.), *Consciousness and Class Experience in 19th Century Europe* (New York, 1979), pp. 196, 199–200.

¹³ E.g., *Orthodox Churchman's Magazine*, 3 (1803), pp. 228–9; Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.271–2, and iii.7.

¹⁴ Cf. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, ch. 1; A. N. Gilbert, 'Sexual Deviance and Disaster during the Napoleonic Wars', *Albion*, 9 (1977), pp. 98–113; A. D. Harvey, 'Prosecutions for Sodomy in England at the Beginning of the 19th Century', *Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), pp. 939–48.

endorsed ‘separation of spheres’ between male and female aptitudes.¹⁵ Yet, at the same time, a counter-current propelled by even more antique notions of male virtue tended to encourage forms of warrior self-assertion which blended awkwardly at best with enlightened or evangelical expectation: hence the taunts to which the piously disposed had to resign themselves throughout the war as they stepped forward to condemn duelling, violent pastimes and sexual irregularity – all activities justified by their defenders as natural, inseparable, perhaps even desirable, aspects of the ideal masculine character.¹⁶ It seems defensible to conclude, nonetheless, that, by the closing years of the war, the more evangelical view of ‘virtue’ was steadily gaining ascendancy. Key Evangelicals, at any rate, believed this to be true.¹⁷

These, then, were some of the implications which the French wars raised for debate over national morals. From a general viewpoint, war raised the moral reform stakes being played for. Yet there was no guarantee that this situation would strengthen the position or help to prolong the existence of the specific organisations which activists of the pre-war period had devised for their own purposes. In the realm of moral reform, as in the overlapping areas of poor law administration, philanthropy and religious recruitment, the war years were times of uncertainty, regrouping and changed priorities as well as of ultimately extended effort.

From Bettering Society to Society for the Suppression of Vice

A first example of the process of adaptation may be found by looking to the case of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor. The ‘Bettering Society’ was set up in December 1796. While its title out of context may give rise to impressions of uncalculating and spontaneous largesse, this was hardly the intention of the founders, and their work may in one sense be classified as a predictable offshoot of the pre-war Proclamation Society. The declared objective of the society – ‘to collect information respecting the circumstances and situation of the poor, and the most effective means of meliorating their condition’ – certainly suggests a group setting out to occupy, in its

¹⁵ E.g., *Vice Society. Address*, i.94–7; and *Bettering Society. Reports* (1805), iv.184ff. See also Colley, *Britons*, pp. 250–73.

¹⁶ Note, e.g., the opposition of William Windham, Secretary at War, to an 1802 bill to abolish bull-baiting on the grounds that it ‘was . . . directed to the destruction of the old English character’ and would have particularly severe effect on those parts of the country ‘known to produce the best soldiers in the army’: *Parliamentary History* (1802), xxxvi.834, 840. See also [Anon], *Letter to a Member of the Vice Society*, pp. 23–5, and cf. J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 114.

¹⁷ Cf. Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.309–10, 339–40 (1798–9) with *Life*, iv.143 (1813). See also J. E. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace. Anti-War Liberalism in England 1793–1815* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 256.

chosen area of specialisation, the co-ordinating and standard-setting role first developed by the older society for more general purposes. Thomas Bernard, the leading promoter of the new society, was less explicit than Wilberforce had been in 1787 in defining his target group for recruitment but it becomes clear that the 'liberal and benevolent minds' Bernard hoped to attract were to be found in a comparable elite: magistrates, public officials, employers of labour and landowners were all to be encouraged to take part in a scheme of 'circulation of useful and practical information, derived from experience'. The cumulative result, it was hoped, would be to promote the cause of morality and virtue among the labouring poor by building up habits of self-reliance which in turn would reduce reliance on the poor rate.¹⁸ Bernard's three companions in founding the new enterprise were Wilberforce, E. J. Eliot and Bernard's cousin, Bishop Barrington of Durham. All four were active members of the Proclamation Society, bound together by an ambition, recently thwarted, to become experimental social administrators. (They had, in the spring of 1796, devised a plan to take over the running of the Marylebone workhouse in order to make it a showpiece institution of efficient moral management, but the vestry had turned them down.¹⁹)

These evolutionary links admitted, it is still difficult to imagine the Bettering Society springing into existence had there been no war, no surge of concern at the effects of an unprecedented degree of sustained and recurrent economic dislocation. The society's founders were doubtless predisposed to take an interest in the apparently growing problem of relieving the poor by their experience of pre-war debate and through personal observation. (Bernard was an active JP in Buckinghamshire; Wilberforce had drawn Hannah More's attention to the demoralised state of the mining villages of Somerset as early as 1789.²⁰) But it was the bad season of 1795–6 – its effect on subsistence food prices, on the labour market, on public order and on respect for the authority-wielding classes – which turned discussion into action. Humanity and prudence combined to release an unprecedented surge of public and private relief to tide matters over in the short term. The first year of operation of the widely publicised Speenhamland system of wage supplementation – 1795–6 – saw poor rates rise to an estimated total of £5 million, to which was added, on F. M. Eden's calculation, £6 million in private charity.²¹ The founders of the Bettering Society took full part in this mobilisation, forging links with useful new allies in the process. (The most notable of these, in the light of later developments, were the

¹⁸ *Bettering Society. Reports* (1798), i.413–23, esp. pp. 414–17.

¹⁹ J. Baker, *The Life of Sir Thomas Bernard, Bt.* (1819), pp. 12–13. Fourteen of the forty members of the Bettering Society's first committee were also members of the Proclamation Society: *Bettering Society. Reports*, i.424–5; *Proclamation Society. Report for 1799*, pp. 25–35.

²⁰ Baker, *Bernard*, p. 31; M. Jones, *Hannah More* (Cambridge, 1952), p. 151.

²¹ Cited in I. R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late 18th Century Britain* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 122–3.

stipendiary magistrate, Patrick Colquhoun, already active in the organisation of ‘rational relief’ for the metropolitan poor, and William Allen, Quaker businessman and chief organiser, with Colquhoun, of the Spitalfields Soup Society between 1797 and 1801.²²)

Yet the problem which the founders of the Bettering Society thought most ominous by the summer of 1796 was the prospect not merely of physical distress but of the habits likely to be encouraged among the labouring poor if dependence on relief were to become a prolonged or often-repeated experience. It was not that modern society was any less capable of supporting its members than past ones had been. (In Bernard’s view, modern society was in fact richer overall.) The problem was that the spread of market-oriented methods of production and distribution seemed inherently to make life less predictable for the labouring poor: fluctuations in demand for their labour undercut any attempt they might make to plan their lives or to acquire the habits of regularity and calculated self-control on which a sense of moral responsibility for their actions might be built.²³

The return of famine and of urban unemployment in the years 1799–1801 powerfully reinforced the sense of foreboding. These were, by no coincidence, the years during which Robert Malthus began to gain a receptive audience for his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. (The essay was published in its first form in 1798.) But Bernard was no unqualified admirer of Malthus. Nor did the events of the late 1790s dent his Smithian faith in the ‘desire implanted in the human breast of bettering its condition’.²⁴ If only the natural impulse to self-improvement could be uncovered and given judicious environmental protection, then the circle might yet be squared and the moral economy of the social order vindicated.

Such dogged optimism stands in contrast to the darker view of human potential and of divine purpose which breaks surface in the activities of the other major moral reform association begun during the war years. This was the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which started operations in 1802. While the Bettering Society was substantially a long-maturing project brought to birth, so to speak, by the induced delivery of wartime conditions, the Vice Society was clearly a child conceived in wartime. The puzzle is, perhaps, to explain why its appearance was delayed to as late a date as 1802. The urge to enforce compliance in matters of political and ideological orthodoxy was after all strongly developed

²² ‘Iatros’ [G. D. Yeats], *A Biographical Sketch of the Life and Writings of Patrick Colquhoun Esq. LL.D.* (1818), pp. 18–19, 34; *The Life of William Allen* (3 vols., 1846), i.33, 38, 53–4; *Bettering Society. Reports*, i.303–12. Note also Wilberforce’s relief efforts in the West Riding at this time: Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.360, 384, and iii.4–6.

²³ *Bettering Society. Reports* (1800), ii.1–31, esp. pp. 1–6, 19–20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, i.v. For Bernard on Malthus, see *ibid.* (1802), iii.5. For general surveys of early reactions to Malthus, see J. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism* (1969), pp. 165–9; D. Winch, *Riches and Poverty. An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 11.

among the opinion-forming ranks from late 1792 onwards, yet it took the best part of another decade to provoke volunteer policing activity for specifically 'moral' purposes.

One explanation for this lag might be to suggest that the Proclamation Society was already in place to channel any energies which might be aroused. However, this hardly squares with the known evidence: the society, while keeping itself fitfully before the public eye with its test case prosecutions (see chapter 1), proved incapable of retaining even its own membership, let alone tapping new energies. By 1798 it was virtually in receivership. (The indispensable Thomas Bernard was invited in to retrieve order in its membership records and accounts.²⁵) In the meantime irritants to independent action grew. In London, where the process is best documented and probably most pronounced in any case, the spur to take specifically volunteer action may temporarily have been blunted by official action. (The Middlesex Justices Act, a modified version of Pitt's rejected 1785 policing proposal, was passed in 1792, before the onset of wartime tensions. It created at last a corps of salaried, full-time magistrates to oversee the policing of metropolitan London. Several of the magistrates appointed under it, however, played a leading role in co-ordinating social policy in their areas of jurisdiction and at least one of them – Colquhoun – developed definite and well-publicised views on the control of vice and moral indiscipline into the bargain.²⁶) Still, as wartime dislocations multiplied, magistrates were hard pressed in all directions and, even more to the point, opinion in certain circles of the metropolitan business and professional world began to harden, and to identify precise areas of problem behaviour.

Matters came to a head in late 1801 and early 1802 under the influence of several interlocking sets of perceptions. First came the realisation that the Middlesex Justices Act was due for renewal in 1802. Whether this Act had made metropolitan London a more law-abiding place was not entirely clear to contemporaries. Early apparent success had been followed by later war-related disorders concerning recruitment and food prices and, with the Peace of Amiens now in its final stages of negotiation, demobilisation soon seemed likely to put the whole system under the severest test.²⁷ Besides, all of this was taking place in the socially unsettling aftermath of the dearth of 1799–1801.²⁸ And, to tighten

²⁵ *Proclamation Society. Report for 1799*, pp. 3, 22; *Report for 1800*, pp. 11–12; *Report for 1802*, p. 12.

²⁶ For the 1792 Act, see D. Philips, 'The Institutionalization of Law-Enforcement in England 1780–1830', in V. Gatrell *et al.* (eds.), *Crime and the Law. The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (1980), pp. 168–70, supplemented by R. Paley, 'The Middlesex Justices Act of 1792: Its Origins and Effects' (University of Reading Ph.D., 1983), pp. 226ff. For Colquhoun's social policy activities, see 'Iatros', *Colquhoun*, pp. 18ff. For links between individual magistrates appointed under the 1792 Act and the Proclamation Society, see Innes, 'Politics and Morals', p. 96.

²⁷ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, pp. 204–6; Paley, 'The Middlesex Justices Act', pp. 362–6.

²⁸ Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.11–13. Cf. Emsley, *French Wars*, pp. 87–8.

the screw of anxiety a final notch, the period from 1797 onwards was a time never entirely free from rumour of domestic political conspiracy, often linked with the threat of French invasion. While the last invasion scare before the 'Amiens interlude' took place in the summer of 1801, those unconvinced by the wisdom of making peace with an undefeated and ideologically unrepentant enemy remained unconvinced as well that domestic political tensions had been defused. A sprinkling of 'Jacobin' victories in strategically significant urban electorates in the general election of July 1802 was shortly to convince them afresh that the 'spirit of rebellion' was a fire barely banked, let alone extinguished.²⁹

It was in this atmosphere that twenty-nine members of the metropolitan upper-middle ranks met in March of 1802, shortly before the official declaration of peace, to set the new society in motion.³⁰ The objectives they chose to pursue were a slightly expanded list of the objectives set out in the royal proclamation of 1787: profanation of the Lord's Day and profane swearing; publication of blasphemous, licentious and obscene books and prints; selling by false weights and measures; the keeping of disorderly public houses, brothels and gaming houses; procuring; illegal lotteries; and cruelty to animals.³¹ Some of these objectives we recognise directly as the almost automatic relistings of the 'running sores' of metropolitan living over the previous hundred years and more. But others had attracted attention or gained a new lease of life because of the experiences of the present and very recent past – control of weights and measures, for example, being a vestigial attempt to show as much concern about protection of the common people against profiteers in times of dearth as was compatible with the acceptance of the growing but morally challenging orthodoxy about the unavoidable disciplines of the marketplace.³² And the objects that we shall see carried most weight in the minds of recruits to the cause usually managed to harness elements of traditional fear and distaste with highly contemporary anxieties about social discipline, self-control and

²⁹ See, e.g., J. Bowles, *Thoughts on the Late General Election as Demonstrative of the Progress of Jacobinism* (1802). Cf. J. A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth. Radicalism in London 1796–1821* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 133ff.; I. McCalman, *Radical Underworld* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 11–12; C. Jewson, *Jacobin City* (Glasgow, 1975), pp. 108–10.

³⁰ For a printed report of proceedings, including a list of those present, see Dartmouth MSS, Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford, D1778/V/678. Significantly, only three of the twenty-nine present are listed as members of the Proclamation Society in its *Report for 1802*.

³¹ *Proposal for Establishing a Society for the Suppression of Vice and the Encouragement of Religion and Virtue, throughout the United Kingdom* (1801), pp. 1–2; *Vice Society. Address*, ii.4. Lotteries and animal cruelty had not been included in the 1787 proclamation.

³² Cf. J. Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales 1790–1810* (Cambridge MA, 1983), p. 77. Note also the widespread unease among otherwise 'loyal' moral reformers about the demoralising effects of lotteries, including the 'legal' ones sponsored by revenue-hungry wartime governments: Colquhoun, *Police of the Metropolis*, pp. 133ff.; *Vice Society Address*, ii.63 ff.; *Bettering Society. Reports*, iv.13–14.

'loyalty'. Among the upper ranks, the most lively concern centred once more on 'blasphemous, licentious and obscene literature', an Achilles heel of the example-setting classes now looking more than ever vulnerable after recent events in France where a debauched aristocracy was widely believed to have set the example of passions unleashed by which it was itself to perish.³³ At the lower social level the behaviour which focused anxiety most powerfully was profanation of the Lord's Day – behaviour which was, once again, no novelty, but suddenly seemed more symbolically threatening. Looking to the disorderly, undeferential and often brutal leisure pastimes of fitfully prosperous urban labourers, sensitive observers were inclined to wonder how long this rebellion against the laws of God and man could continue before judgement fell on a sinful nation.³⁴ When both concerns blended into one, as they did over the spread of the Sunday newspaper, the sense of cultural slide seemed especially intense. How could good order prevail when an expanded reading public was encouraged to spend its surplus income on a diet of sensation and society scandal served up by entrepreneurs driven by the 'inordinate love of illegitimate gain'?³⁵

In all these cases the unrestrained pursuit of market profitability set social and cultural alarm bells ringing. At a precarious moment in national history, it was argued, values needed to be defended and the line held until wider anxieties could be resolved. Parts of the line might need legislative reinforcement. More immediately, something had to be done to police existing laws to a standard higher than the authorities were able or, perhaps, cared to attempt. It was in the hope of having an immediate effect that the founding fathers of the Vice Society took up their brief.

These, then, were the two most striking wartime adaptations of the volunteer principle to moral reform ends. It would be a mistake, however, to deduce from this that all wartime activities in the field were exercises in crisis management. Against them we need also to be aware of complementary activities promoting a slower process of socialisation through education and moral instruction – activities which, as we shall see, drew significant support from men active in the crisis-oriented associations. The hope of improving the morals of the rising generation was, as we already know, a well-established concern of pre-war moral reformers. The Sunday school movement is a case in point. War had not

³³ *Vice Society. Address*, ii.14. Cf. Bowles, *Reflections on the Political and Moral State of Society*, pp. 125–35; Bowles, *Thoughts on the Late General Election*, p. 38; *Orthodox Churchman's Magazine*, 3 (1803), pp. 167–9.

³⁴ *Vice Society. Address*, ii.5–13, 48, 87.

³⁵ *Vice Society. Occasional Report*, no. vi (1812), p. 1. For the rise of the Sunday press, see I. Christie, *Myth and Reality in Late 18th-Century British Politics* (1970), p. 314. For contemporary reaction, including vehement calls for suppression, see *Proclamation Society. Report for 1799*, p. 19; Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.338; J. Bowles, *A Dispassionate Inquiry into the Best Means of National Safety* (1806), pp. 109–15.

been favourable to the growth of this movement. Tensions between Church and Dissent, already rising in the late 1780s, spilled over into scenes of confrontation at both local and national level during the early 1790s as ‘Church and King’ became a patriotic rallying cry, and Dissent and ‘disloyalty’ a wartime taunt.³⁶ In some circles the impulse to spread literacy itself became suspect: there could be no guarantee that readers, once taught, would choose reliable reading matter on which to practise. But, by the end of the 1790s, defenders of orthodoxy, political and religious, were well on the way to accepting the spread of literacy as an accomplished fact and turning their efforts to the task of capturing the market, and the learning process, for the propagation of their own values.³⁷ Earliest into the market had been the Porteus-Wilberforce circle of Evangelicals whose ‘Cheap Repository Tracts’ had set out between 1795 and 1798 (under Hannah More’s editorship) to battle ‘vulgar and licentious publications’ by adopting the style and distribution methods of the popular literature they deplored.³⁸

During the crisis years at the turn of the century, defenders of ‘national values’ became notably uneasy at the way in which citizens and subjects of the next generation were being left unserved by any reliable agency – the Church of England was usually thought the appropriate one – and allowed to drift into the arms of Dissent, or worse. Wilberforce, Bernard and Colquhoun, among others, all attempted to publicise the need and to commit civil and Church authorities to the task at this time. And they explicitly justified their proposals as necessary complements to charitable and magisterial action.³⁹ In the event all were overshadowed by the entrepreneurial Joseph Lancaster who, by publicising a ‘system’ in much the same way as Robert Raikes a generation before, managed temporarily to reconcile popular demand with Establishment approval. (It was in 1805 that Lancaster, a Quaker of ‘Calvinistic’ upbringing, lured George III into providing him with an irresistible selling slogan: ‘It is my wish that every poor child in my dominions should be taught to read the Bible’.⁴⁰) Lancaster, however, was a better publicist than an administrator, and his inability to match income to expenditure meant that between 1808 and 1814,

³⁶ R. Soloway, *Prelates and People. Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England 1783–1852* (1969), pp. 358–60, 363–4; T. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability* (1976), pp. 65–74.

³⁷ Soloway, *Prelates and People*, p. 362; Harvey, *Britain in the Early 19th Century*, ch. 7.

³⁸ For Proclamation Society support of this scheme, see its *Seventh Report* (1795), p. 14. For the scheme itself, see Jones, *Hannah More*, pp. 137–44; S. Pedersen, ‘Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late 18th-Century England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), pp. 84–7, 109–13.

³⁹ Wilberforce, *Life*, ii.309 and iii.66; *Bettering Society. Reports*, iv.30, 37–8, and appendix, p. 88; ‘Iatros’, *Colquhoun*, pp. 43–5. See also R. Watson [bishop of Llandaff], *A Sermon Preached before the Society for the Suppression of Vice* (1804), pp. 3, 6; J. Bowles, *A View of the Moral State of Society* (1804 edn), pp. 106–7.

⁴⁰ The Lancaster system was based on a plan of delegated instruction, the (salaried) master instructing pupil ‘monitors’ who in turn instructed other, less advanced pupils. It thus minimised expense, and therefore fees.

as his organisation extended, his control over it became ever more precarious. Into the business opportunity thus created came two broad groups, the first made up of evangelicals (chiefly Dissenters) led by the tireless William Allen (last mentioned as a valued recruit to the Bettering Society), the second a group of Whig-radical promoters of secular enlightenment ideals, Brougham, Whitbread, James Mill and Francis Place prominent among them.⁴¹ By 1816 this alliance of convenience had reached deadlock over the form and content of religious instruction in the education provided. But long before this, the Royal Lancasterian Institution (or British and Foreign School Society as it became in 1814) had triggered anxious interest in its work from another quarter – that of the Established Church or, at least, of its leading High Church laity.

These details concern us only to the extent that they draw attention to a strand of moral reformism which tends to be underplayed in comparison to the attention given to evangelical and secular radical activity. This is the strand of volunteer mobilisation which traces its origins to Church and King loyalism. Its most interesting representative from our point of view is John Bowles, a loyalist pamphleteer and ally of John Reeves, the chief co-ordinator of the loyal association movement begun in 1792. Bowles was also, by the late 1790s, an intimate of that group of Churchmen shortly to become known as the Hackney Phalanx – the High Church’s answer to the resource-mobilising Evangelical elite of the Clapham Sect. At the same time, this group was beginning to develop an interest in moral reform: Bowles, in company with the group’s leading clerical members, Archdeacon Watson and H. H. Norris, became a late recruit to the Proclamation Society (1802) and, shortly after, an eager recruit and key executive member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice.⁴²

High Churchmen, both within the Vice Society and in their other volunteer activities, were distinctive in their support for social and ecclesiastical discipline by reason of the special reverence which they accorded to duly constituted, hierarchical authority. They fully endorsed a diagnosis of crisis but regarded any irregular or tradition-overtaking attempts to deal with the situation as likely to prove cures as bad as the age’s authority-challenging disease. They therefore supported the bulk of the Church hierarchy in rejecting Whitbread’s 1807 bill to establish a national system of elementary education not under clerical control.⁴³ They also looked with distaste and growing alarm on ‘non-denominational’ evangelical volunteer solutions to the perceived educational problems of the new age – not only the Lancasterian schools but also the enormously successful

⁴¹ H. B. Binns, *A Century of Education, being the Centenary History of the British and Foreign School Society 1808–1908* (1908), pp. 9–42.

⁴² *Proclamation Society. Report for 1802*, pp. 15–20; E. Churton, *Memoir of Joshua Watson* (2 vols., 1861), i.82ff.; de Montluzin, *Anti-Jacobins*, pp. 32, 67; E. Vincent, ‘“The Real Grounds of the Present War”: John Bowles and the French Revolutionary Wars, 1792–1802’, *History*, 78 (1993), pp. 393–420.

⁴³ J. Bowles, *Letter to Samuel Whitbread* (1807). Cf. Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.342. See also Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 209, 215–16; Soloway, *Prelates and People*, pp. 367–70.

British and Foreign Bible Society, an organisation begun in 1804 and quickly setting new standards of resource-mobilisation in its grass-roots network of auxiliaries.⁴⁴ It was in this atmosphere, not so much of military or political crisis, but of sectarian tension, that Bowles, Archdeacon Watson's brother, Joshua, and their allies made their next step by sponsoring a central organisation to tap resources for a national system of elementary education under the direction of the Church. This was the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, founded in 1811.⁴⁵ Its later success against its volunteer competitors was crushing, though it falls beyond our brief.

It suffices for present purposes to note that the eventual foundation of the National Society shows, first, that loyalist volunteers proved as capable as more recognisably innovatory groups of adapting goals to suit time and circumstance. They were usually slower to act but their organisations, once formed, tended to have wide support and considerable staying power.⁴⁶ The other point worth noting is that the war years, initially unpropitious, see a significant reconfirmation and extension of 'the voluntary principle' in the area of education for the poor. The ground must be occupied, all agree, but the matter being at core one of religious and moral socialisation, it is most flexibly and perhaps even best done by the corporate enterprise of volunteers rather than by the direct extension of state authority.

Religion, region and rank: patterns of wartime mobilisation

By the time the National Society was launched, the Proclamation Society, flagship of pre-war moral reform causes, had been effectively out of action for ten years – indeed beached by its founder for the last three.⁴⁷ It had become outdated for various reasons, not least its attitude to the type of volunteer recruit whose services and support it wished to attract. (Proclamation Society leaders, it will be recalled, had made a tacit but firm decision from the start in favour of social influence over size of membership.) In general terms, the developments

⁴⁴ See W. Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (5 vols., 1904–10), i.11–13, 47–59, 66–72, for the society's foundation and early growth. High Church criticism of its methods of operation is set out in *ibid.*, i.303–9, and in R. H. Martin, *Evangelicals United. Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain 1795–1830* (1983), ch. 6.

⁴⁵ Churton, *Watson*, i.94–5, 102ff.; A. B. Webster, *Joshua Watson. The Story of a Layman 1771–1855* (1954), pp. 33ff.

⁴⁶ For the initially ambivalent reaction of Church Evangelicals to the National Society, see J. Pearson, *Life of William Hey* (2 vols., 1822), ii.190–2; Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.478, and iv.197. Figures confirming the National Society's long-term dominance of the field may be found in D. Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660–1960* (Cambridge MA, 1964), p. 119.

⁴⁷ Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.236, dates the society's disappearance to 1805, though there is a possible reference to a brief revival in 1808 (p. 361). For detail of the effective transfer of most of the society's law-enforcing functions to the Vice Society, see Bishop Porteus to Wilberforce, 3 June 1803, Wilberforce MSS (Bodl.), c. 3, fo. 66; *Vice Society. Address*, ii.93–6; *Orthodox Churchman's Magazine*, 5 (1805), pp. 396–7.

of wartime both undermined the political and social assumptions about networks of influence on which pre-war associations had relied, and encouraged extended mobilisation among 'right-minded people' as a desirable end in its own right. The quantifiable extent of that mobilisation will need to be set out in due course. Yet numbers were never the only criterion of success even to the wartime societies and, by one measure at least, these societies often prided themselves on being more selective than pre-war groupings had been. This measure was one of religious belief and commitment.

It was no doubt to be expected that an age of heightened ideological tension should also be an age of evangelising fervour, of sectarian division. The deterioration in relations between Churchmen and Protestant Dissenters has already been noted for its effects on the Sunday school movement. In fact the urge among Churchmen to revalue the importance of hierarchy and authority had its effect across the whole world of volunteer association. The latitudinarian willingness of moral reform leaders of the Proclamation Society mould to accept that common social objectives might be gained from a variety of religious starting points faded. In its place emerged a three-way split, familiar enough to historians of the nineteenth century – a cleavage dividing evangelicals (themselves split between Church and Dissent) from the heirs (comparatively speaking) of a tradition of secular enlightenment, and dividing both from the ranks of the newly reinvigorated defenders of prescriptive rights and of national institutions, in particular the Church of England.

Examples of the differentiating process in action are most readily found in the field of education, with results we have recently traced. They are less easy to identify in the field of charity organisation. Here Sir Thomas Bernard stands, pious but inscrutable, as a mediating figure in the Proclamation Society mould, a man prepared to encourage secular institutional experiment and church-building, Quaker urban charity and Establishment rural paternalism with an even hand. In Bernard's world Establishment figures such as Dr Glasse and Bishop Barrington continue to cooperate with evangelicals (Church and Dissenting) such as Wilberforce and William Allen, and professionals of no marked religious inclination at all, such as Patrick Colquhoun and Count Rumford. And the incentives held out to recruits remain equally undogmatic:

Whether we regard, generally, the fallen state of man . . . or . . . the recent and unmeasured increase of wealth, luxury, and dissipation, in this country . . . or the seeds of anarchy, insubordination and infidelity, so industriously and so successfully disseminated over the modern world, – we shall discover causes of civil disorder and dissolution which must appall [sic] the most undaunted mind.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Bettering Society. Reports*, iv.31. Bernard is often claimed as an Evangelical (e.g., in Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 85, 87), mainly on the basis of his friendships and of his presumed indifference to ecclesiastical boundaries, but Wilberforce regarded him as placing too great a trust in the human capacity for self-improvement to qualify – this in spite of a keen admiration for his ideas and work: *Life*, iii.237, 497.

Even Bernard's capacity to keep all parties in harness began to slip as the war neared its end, however. The specialist Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor, set up to encourage the raising and rational distribution of charity during the trade slump of 1811–12, was a disappointment even to its promoters. These promoters, Bernard and Wilberforce prominent among them, had taken careful precautions to avoid any suspicion of sectarian exclusiveness: local volunteers, for example, were given specific advice to canvass the support of 'all persons who are capable of assisting'. Yet the association's central committee found it impossible to follow this advice in recruiting to its own ranks.⁴⁹ The London-based Church Evangelicals who found themselves left with near-exclusive charge of the work had little hesitation in tracing the trouble to two sources – resentment at metropolitan interference and suspicion of pro-government political bias. As the politics of the situation revolved heavily around the question of the legitimacy of the government's war policies (particularly its economic blockade of Napoleonic Europe), and as this in turn was expressed in terms of religious and regional cleavage (the campaign against the Orders in Council being an organisational triumph of provincial Dissent),⁵⁰ it becomes clear that the cause of systematic charity was not exempt from the religious tensions of the period.

But the first moral reform grouping to apply an outright test of religious orthodoxy to its recruits was, significantly, the Society for the Suppression of Vice. This was not a matter of furtive manipulation: it was a conscious decision announced to prospective supporters at the planning stage by organisers who, while admitting that 'numbers of truly valuable and exemplary characters, are to be found among every religious sect or persuasion', argued that common objectives were most effectively secured by separate denominational action. The implication followed that, of all the contenders, it was Churchmen who were peculiarly fitted to act as defenders of the 'national' moral interest.⁵¹

This defensively expressed but non-negotiable claim to exclusiveness drew a variety of responses. Dissenters, when they cared to comment, sensed the slur being cast on their social reliability and, in some cases at least, openly regretted the denial of an opportunity to support a cause of which they approved.⁵² Some Church Evangelicals found the policy off-putting as well. ('Clapham

⁴⁹ For details of organisation, see *Philanthropist*, 2 (1812), p. 233; Baker, *Bernard*, p. 96. Committee lists may be found in *Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor. Reports*, i (1813), p. 21, and ii (1815), p. 39.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 25 May 1812, p. 3; Wilberforce, *Life*, iv.36. Cf. Cookson, *Friends of Peace*, pp. 190–3.

⁵¹ *Vice Society. Proposal*, p. 1. See also the Society's *Address*, i.40, 58, a document almost certainly drafted by John Bowles on the evidence of contemporary attribution (*Annual Review*, 3 (1805), p. 225), and of congruences in style and thought with other Bowles publications at the time.

⁵² *Evangelical Magazine*, 11 (1803), p. 407; 13 (1805), p. 227; 15 (1807), p. 530. Cf. the more suspicious attitude towards volunteer law enforcement set out in *Monthly Repository*, 6 (1811), pp. 411–15: Unitarians, at least, had not all forgotten Dr Priestley's ordeal at the hands of the Birmingham mob in 1791.

Evangelicals' were especially cautious, most of their leaders taking several years to sign on as members of the new society.⁵³) From an entirely different perspective, Erastian traditionalists seized on the exclusion policy as the sure sign of a 'puritan' or 'methodist' clique at work. This charge, we recall, had once been levelled against the Proclamation Society, and Vice Society publicists seem to have been as alive to the need to reassure the nervous on this point as their predecessors had been. Once again, however, some of the suspicion stuck.⁵⁴

The reward, however, for openly aligning the society with religious orthodoxy was, of course, the support of the patriotically inclined on a scale to cast the Proclamation Society quite into the shade. For a start the new society could rely on the support of the vigorous anti-Jacobin press which had sprung up in the closing years of the 1790s.⁵⁵ And then the events of the years which followed foundation – resumption of the war in 1803, the invasion scares and the massive military setbacks which followed – all recharged the atmosphere of moral alarm which, in the aftermath of the Peace of Amiens (1802), had threatened to dissipate.⁵⁶ Instead, an initially stalled recruitment drive gathered pace, membership rising from 561 in early 1803 to around 1,200 by the end of 1804, with the core of the Proclamation Society's active membership absorbed along the way.⁵⁷ Even then, the tide, it seemed, was still coming in. A Shoreditch businessman recalled the mood:

About the close of the year 1806, I think, it was suggested to some of the inhabitants, that the miseries that were then overspreading the Continent . . . was [sic] a visitation from Heaven for their iniquities; and some impression struck their minds that we ourselves were sinking, in a certain degree, in an unhappy and rapid progress towards infidelity, and that some effort should be made lest we might be subject to the same judgements. Under those ideas . . . they therefore agreed to associate together to see if any thing could be done to suppress those evils, not only the breach of the Sabbath, that was the first object; but to prevent the exhibition of obscene prints; bad houses, and short weights, were the other objects that we intended to attack.⁵⁸

The view that God judged nations for collective sin, sometimes regarded as the sign of an evangelical Old Testament 'mind set', was clearly a view

⁵³ About one-third of those present at the inaugural meeting were Evangelicals on the evidence of their support for 'party causes' such as the Church Missionary and Bible Societies. The Clapham elite, however, were slow to join and, as we shall see, doubtful about what they found when they did join: M. Roberts, 'The Society for the Suppression of Vice and its Early Critics, 1802–1812', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 165, 172.

⁵⁴ *Vice Society. Address*, i.60–1; *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 14 (1803), pp. 198–9. Cf. [Anon], *Letter to a Member of the Vice Society*, pp. 10, 19; *Cobbett's Political Register*, 5 (1804), pp. 57, 112; *Annual Review*, 3 (1805), pp. 230–1.

⁵⁵ Roberts, 'Vice Society', pp. 167–8; de Montluzin, *Anti-Jacobins*, pp. 20–1.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Annual Review*, 3 (1805), pp. 227ff.; [Anon], *Letter to a Member*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ *Vice Society. Address*, i.5–20; Watson, *A Sermon preached before the Society for the Suppression of Vice*, pp. 41–72.

⁵⁸ HC SC on Police, *PP 1817* (484), vii.381.

capable of taking hold among a much wider religious public, given the right conditions.⁵⁹

There was a penalty to be paid in the longer term, however, for associating the work of the Vice Society with patriotic orthodoxy. This was an inability to maintain enthusiasm among supporters once the time of crisis was passed – and a self-disqualification from falling back on a non-exclusive membership, should that become a practical way of forwarding the objects of the society. The vulnerable nature of the society's appeal is all too readily evidenced by the curve of its subscription receipts – up from £225 in 1802 to a plateau of more than £1,000 per annum between 1803 and 1807 (peak £1,370 in 1804) before an abrupt descent to the £500 level in 1808–10 and a further collapse thereafter.⁶⁰ The anti-Jacobin taint had its effect on administrative continuity as well: John Bowles, the society's most assiduous committee member, had done sufficiently well out of 'Mr Pitt's war' to be worth claiming as a victim in the Whig–radical anti-corruption campaign of the later war years.⁶¹ All this gave an opening to those enthusiasts, still committed to the general objectives of the cause, who had been excluded or deterred by the aggressive Churchmanship of the Vice Society. While the ending of the war eventually caught up with them in turn, they did make their brief mark in 1809–12 as an alternative Society for Promoting the External Observance of the Lord's Day and for the Suppression of Public Lewdness. Drawing on the Bible Society precedent, this group drew their committee from an equal number of Dissenters and Churchmen.⁶²

But how vigorous were any of these organisations in the wider context? We have noted that the Bettering Society envisaged a national network of associated elites along Proclamation Society lines. The Vice Society, too, aspired to spread itself 'throughout the United Kingdom', as its *Proposal* stated it; and the rival education societies in place by 1811 were clearly incapable of aiming for anything less than national coverage. There were, all the same, geographical as well as (or, often, in association with) religious limits to volunteer mobilisation.

In contrast to the position in the 1780s, it was London which in general took the initiative, set the agenda and rallied the core of support for the wartime societies. True, London, when it urged expansion, always said it aimed to stimulate local energies, not to displace them. Yet, as the promoters of the Bettering

⁵⁹ Cf. also *Orthodox Churchman's Magazine*, 5 (1803), pp. 228–9; Bowles, *Dispassionate Inquiry*, p. 107.

⁶⁰ Vice Society finances have been calculated, in default of official record, from the ledger entries of its central account with Hoare's Bank, 37 Fleet Street, London. These records remain with the bank, whose permission to inspect them is gratefully acknowledged.

⁶¹ Roberts, 'Vice Society', pp. 171–2.

⁶² See *Christian Observer*, 9 (1810), p. 524, for a report of its first public meeting, chaired by the Revd William Gurney, rector of St Clement's, Strand. (Gurney was an Evangelical, a one-time protégé of Thomas Bernard, who had been present at the founding meeting of the Vice Society but left it in 1805.)

Society (in particular) found, suspicions often remained.⁶³ London societies, so far as they did penetrate other parts of the country, did so very much along the informal circuits of information and influence of the political and/or fashionable elite. The difference was that this time the current ran from the metropolis to the provinces. Clergy and magistrates had their influence, as they had in the 1780s: the Bettering Society, for example, had especially good contacts with the diocese of Durham, of which Bernard's cousin was bishop. Occasionally a link might even be forged with representatives of the new manufacturing and commercial dynasties of urban provincial England. (Bernard had dealings both with William Rathbone of Liverpool and with the first Sir Robert Peel, the manufacturer, from whom he accepted in 1800 a donation of £1,000 to be applied to the support of parish apprentices.⁶⁴) But we have already seen how Bernard was, in 1802, to fall out publicly with the entrepreneurial millowners of the West Riding and their professional apologist, William Hey, and links thereafter seem not to have been sought with any energy. Overall, the society may be said to have flourished for more than a decade (and lingered on for another, until Bernard's death in 1818). But it flourished best in the 'old England' of the agricultural interest and the London-based chartered business enterprises and professions.⁶⁵ Of the 396 male subscribers to the society in 1804, 10 per cent were peers, another 10 per cent MPs, a further 20 per cent Church of England clergy (including nine bishops) and, on the rough basis of evidence of address, an additional 50 per cent members of the metropolitan business and professional classes.⁶⁶

The Vice Society, by contrast, was a larger organisation from very close to its beginning and, at the same time, one attracting a wider social range of participants. Part of the explanation for its size may be traced to its eagerness to accept women as members – a move which the Bettering Society eventually followed.⁶⁷ But it was a society more willing to extend its social range altogether. Even in 1804, after a delayed influx of aristocracy and gentry, Vice Society membership

⁶³ *Bettering Society. Reports* (1808), v.25–6 (appendix). Cf. *Philanthropist*, 2 (1812), pp. 237–8.

⁶⁴ Baker, *Bernard*, p. 53. For the continued efforts of Peel and Bernard to regulate industrial conditions of labour for parish apprentices – efforts resulting in Peel's Factory Act of 1802 – see *ibid.*, pp. 73–4; Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.445.

⁶⁵ Cf. Emsley, *French Wars*, pp. 159–61.

⁶⁶ *Bettering Society. Reports*, iv.177–89 (appendix), to which total add the 184 subscribers to the Ladies' Committee: *ibid.*, pp. 192–6.

⁶⁷ For membership statistics, see note 57 above. Women are specifically invited to give their support in the Vice Society's 1801 *Proposal*, p. 1. By 1803 they formed 31 per cent of the subscribing membership, an abnormally high rate by contemporary standards: F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in 19th-Century England* (Oxford, 1980), appendix II. Participation was, however, strictly confined to the giving of money, in contrast to the Bettering Society which set up its Ladies' Committee in 1804 with the task of supervising employment, relief and education schemes for the society's women clients: *Reports*, iv.181–2. In both societies the women who joined are overwhelmingly identifiable as wives and daughters of male members.

was dominated by metropolitan businessmen, clergy, lawyers and civil servants. Perhaps even more significantly, the society was prepared to look for members who might be useful to its work at a ‘humbler’ social level: self-help associations were promoted to enlist the support of small traders, eager to escape the cut-throat competition of metropolitan Sunday trading, and ‘some of the most respectable butchers’ in one of the London meat markets were ‘proposed and admitted members’ of the society itself.⁶⁸ The society’s ability to tap sources of local support among London’s suburban business communities has already been evidenced.⁶⁹ Outside London, however, the Vice Society proved no more successful in seeding itself than the Bettering Society. A network of associations in fitful contact with London between 1802 and 1810 totalled only thirteen; and even these thirteen clustered defensively around the county and cathedral towns (Canterbury, Bristol, York), fashionable resorts (Bath, Brighton, Windsor) and war-expanded seaports (Chatham, Hull, Newcastle, Liverpool) which fitted most neatly into the seasonal and/or occupational pattern of a mobile metropolitan membership.⁷⁰

A new urban leadership

All in all, enthusiasts for the associations we have outlined had a definite centre of social and geographical gravity, whatever the fragmentation of their religious views. These causes found their most willing supporters and most active leaders among the metropolitan professional and business classes. The organisations which resulted acted as vehicles for the expression of frustrations, anxieties and aspirations among groups at several social levels, but among this group in particular.

Biographically speaking there is, at first glance, a good deal of continuity from pre-war to wartime activity, at least at the leadership level. Thus the Wilberforces, the Glasses and the Morton Pitts of the pre-war movement continue to give their support, money and a part of their time to the new associations. Yet a distinction needs often to be drawn between trading, sleeping and semi-retired partners in volunteer associations in this, as in other periods. The pre-war leaders maintaining an interest are men by now so securely established in public life

⁶⁸ For West End ‘Society’ membership, see Dartmouth MSS, D1778/V/678, ‘List of names for which the society is indebted to the Rt Hon. Lord Radstock, June 1804’. For small traders, see *Vice Society. Statement of Proceedings* (1804), p. 7; *Occasional Reports*, no. v, pp. 1–2, and no. vi, p. 8.

⁶⁹ See note 58 above. Local activists were more vulnerable to immediate communal hostility than the central body and their attempts more likely to collapse: HC SC on Police, *PP* 1817 (484), vii.388. Impulses thwarted had a way, nonetheless, of re-emerging: *Christian Observer*, 9 (1812), appendix, p. 851.

⁷⁰ *Vice Society. Occasional Reports*, no. v, pp. 1, 7, and no. vi, pp. 6–11; and see *Statement of Proceedings*, pp. 13, 16, for instances of action instigated at Margate and Brighton by resident members of the parent (London) society.

that the constraints of business drive them either to become specialists in one organisation or else to become elder statesmen. As Wilberforce wryly noted in 1802 while attempting to excuse himself from yet another committee meeting, merely to be present was to run the risk of further burdens: 'I am always in the situation of a horse in a summer day, on whom the flies settle the instant he stops.'⁷¹ Wilberforce was, until his semi-retirement in 1812, senior MP for the largest and one of the most war-dislocated counties in England. He still had, throughout this period, intermittent hopes of government office and/or a weakness for fashionable society, renounced only with effort. He was also the MP chiefly responsible for steering the campaign against the slave trade to a workable political and diplomatic solution; and he took a full and active part in the expansion (and defence) of evangelical missionary efforts at home and abroad – work which reached its climax in the debate over renewal of the East India Company's charter in 1812–13.⁷² This was a time in his career when he was prepared to give advice to moral reform enthusiasts and to intervene (as we shall see) in moments of institutional crisis. But he was rarely prepared now to take a leading role unprompted or to involve himself in matters of everyday management.

This is not to suggest that the older generation of moral reform leaders lacked contacts or disciples in the wartime societies. Thomas Bernard (1750–1818), for one, was on intimate family terms with the Wilberforces through the middle and later war years. The habits of business he had acquired as a leading conveyancer, the wealth acquired from marriage and from success in his profession, the time now at his disposal after early retirement – all these skills and resources were to be applied to solve the domestic problems of the Wilberforces as they moved house, as well as to the task of running the Foundling Hospital and the Bettering Society, planning experiments in medical and educational charity, co-ordinating the distribution of emergency food relief, acting as a home counties JP, and accepting appointment as honorary vice-president to the Vice Society and the Bible Society.⁷³

John Shore, first Baron Teignmouth (1751–1834), was another of Wilberforce's intimates and, from the time of his installation as foundation president of the Bible Society in 1804, a central figure in Evangelical circles in a way Bernard was not. He also strengthened the link between 'Clapham' and the new moral reform associations, first by helping to extend the Bettering Society's message to Dublin, thereafter by becoming the first member of the Clapham circle to join the Vice Society (1804), of which he eventually became president

⁷¹ Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.72.

⁷² *Ibid.*, iii.4, 264; iv.36, 54 (Yorkshire business); iii.497; iv.162, 165 (social life and political ambition); iv.10, 101–3, 192 (antislavery, India).

⁷³ Baker, *Bernard*, pp. 1, 11–12, 31, 44–50, 69 ff.; Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.387, 497. Bernard retired from law practice c. 1794–5 at the age of forty-five.

(1828–34).⁷⁴ But in neither case could these men claim the secular public standing that the early Proclamation Society leaders had been hand-picked to possess. (Bernard, in spite of his parentage as son of a pre-rebellion governor of Massachusetts, had a speech impediment and was a notably ‘diffident and reserved’ figure in public, as his otherwise adulatory biographer noted. Teignmouth made his second, Bible Society, career following a term as a stop-gap Governor-General of India, after which he and the East India Company seem largely to have lost interest in one another.⁷⁵) Clapham was, in due course, to produce a distinguished second generation but this was still in the cradle during these years.

We have already taken the point, however, that wartime moral reform activity was not the monopoly of ‘the generation of 1787’ nor of friends and acquaintances of Clapham. Where did the bulk of the new generation of leaders come from? How comfortably did they fit into their society, and how readily did that society concede their claims to public standing?

One point is clear enough: few of the new leaders were hereditary aristocrats, or even county gentry. Committee lists, it is true, continued to advertise the patronage of men of title in their recitations of honorary vice-presidents and the like. The evidence, though, that these figures performed more than an advertising function – a stimulus to vicarious association – is usually missing. An occasional notable individual tests the rule. The Vice Society, for example, probably gained the most fashionable third of its early membership through the efforts of the recently retired admiral, Lord Radstock (1758–1825).⁷⁶ However, there is no obvious sign that his recruits played any more active part in the society’s business than its distinguished but inert first president, the third earl of Dartmouth.⁷⁷

The enthusiasts and work-horses of the new societies were much more likely to emerge from social and occupational backgrounds typical of the majority of the members they attracted – that is, from the ranks of the metropolitan business and professional community. As in the 1780s, only more so, volunteer

⁷⁴ C. Shore, 2nd Baron Teignmouth, *Memoir of the Life and Correspondence of John, Lord Teignmouth* (2 vols., 1843), ii.65, 153–4; *Bettering Society. Reports*, ii.280–92; Diary of 2nd Lord Kenyon, 2 June 1828, Kenyon papers, Gredington, Shropshire.

⁷⁵ Baker, *Bernard*, pp. 1, 107; *DNB*.

⁷⁶ *Annual Biography and Obituary* (1826), pp. 1–14, and see note 68 above. Another Vice Society recruit from the ranks of the landed elite, remarkable more for his unswerving financial support than for his active participation, was the Hon. Philip Pusey (1748–1828), vice-president of the society between 1804 and 1828, and father of the Tractarian leader, Dr Pusey.

⁷⁷ George Legge, 3rd Earl of Dartmouth (1755–1810), Lord Steward of the Household 1802, Lord Chamberlain 1804. His passive role in the Vice Society is deduced from, *inter alia*, Dartmouth MSS, D1778/I ii/1726, Bowles to Dartmouth, 29 Nov. 1808; Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.236. For evidence that aristocrats could on occasion play a key role as honest brokers helping to resolve tensions between volunteer leaders from a position above the fray, see *Life of William Allen*, i.168–9.

associations provided a venue in which men of varying degrees of ‘rawness’ in public life might meet and mingle. Two occupational groups stood out with exceptional prominence – clergy and lawyers. Men of these professions, as we know, had often been to the fore in the 1780s, but these successors can hardly be said to appear in direct line of descent from the county magistrates and clergy-administrators who had made their mark then. The new men were not figures of secure public standing but of lesser rank and more uncertain prospects. They were also men of the metropolis – men conscious of trends in professional life which were eroding the gentlemanly patronage networks of ‘status professionalism’ and beginning to substitute, instead, claims to social standing based on expertise as defined by the professional peer group.⁷⁸ The ‘ideal type’ of these conscientious, middle-ranking careerists tends, as always, to elude exact embodiment, but some individuals come fairly close.

There seems to be a significant pattern, for example, in the careers of the Revd Henry Budd (1774–1853) and of the stipendiary magistrate Patrick Colquhoun (1745–1820). Both achieved a degree of public standing in the course of their lives, Budd as a noted evangelical preacher, Colquhoun as a government adviser and publicist of schemes of systematic public administration and urban ‘police’. Yet both had to struggle to gain security of occupation and public recognition. Colquhoun, at least, died believing that his merits had never adequately been recognised. In 1802, when Budd attended the foundation meeting of the Vice Society, he was still a young man with a career to make. Only recently appointed chaplain of Bridewell Hospital – the result of his physician father’s ‘indefatigable canvassing’ of the hospital governors – he was, we may guess, a man with private, professional and public motives for action: a man eager to vindicate his abilities on his own behalf; eager to establish that network of acquaintance and mutual respect on which a professional reputation might be built; eager also to discharge his religious and social duty at a time of national peril.⁷⁹ Colquhoun, by contrast, was already a man in mid-career. While his sense of vocation frustrated was already half apparent, he could still pride himself on being very much self-made, risen (so far as a patronage-organised society had allowed) by his own energy and abilities from the position of double outsider (a Scotsman and an entrepreneur) to a prominent position in metropolitan legal, philanthropic and intellectual circles. As a full-time paid magistrate under Home Office supervision, he was under no illusions about the tendency to depravity of modern commercially active urban society, nor about the potential for disorder of the war-affected London poor over whom he exercised jurisdiction. Indeed, modern

⁷⁸ Cf. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (1987), pp. 260–70; P. Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions* (1972), pp. 32–43; A. Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (1980), chs. 2–3.

⁷⁹ DNB; *A Memoir of the Rev. Henry Budd* (1855), pp. 79, 82.

commentators have identified his publications as incitements to alarm in their own right, a judgement which in turn classifies him as a ‘moral entrepreneur’ – someone with a vested interest in creating a market for his own expertise.⁸⁰

Colquhoun, of course, effectively had two careers, the first as a Glasgow businessman, the second as a London magistrate, so the tag ‘moral entrepreneur’ is an apt one. The description will mislead, however, if it is taken to imply that Colquhoun’s career was an isolated example of self-serving individualism. Colquhoun was not alone in pursuing a career across the boundary between trade and profession. Nor was the profession which he helped to create in the course of his second career an unexpected or isolated act of individual will. Intellectual, social and economic pressures of the age all helped to create a demand for occupational specialisation as well as to encourage suppliers of saleable expertise.⁸¹

It is true, all the same, that some specialisations produced more stable careers than others. This was particularly true of government employment during the war years (and volunteer societies attracted significant numbers of clerks and functionaries to membership). A police magistrate was reasonably secure, once installed. Other semi-professionals who benefited from wartime demand for their enthusiasm and skills found their tenure less secure. Nor could continuing public esteem for their work be guaranteed. The effect on individual character seems overall to have been variable. Cobbett, for one, turned radical as a result (in politics if not in social values). Others, and notably those from respectable, middle-ranking backgrounds, ‘externalised’ their sense of insecurity in the reverse direction, neutralising doubts about their qualification for social reward by especially energetic efforts to justify the legitimacy of the political and cultural order which had promoted their prospects so handsomely. Such a career progression certainly fits a good sample of 1790s High Church loyalist recruits to moral reform causes. Pre-eminent among these is John Bowles (1751–1819), an anti-Jacobin publicist and, on his own word, the Vice Society’s most assiduous committee man. Born the son of a City printseller and trained for the law, he turned, as we have seen, to loyalist activities in the early 1790s, finding spiritual and social support meanwhile in a circle of prosperous professional and commercial friends of firm High Church beliefs. These friends never deserted him, and finally commemorated him by a wall tablet in Bath Abbey.

⁸⁰ For Colquhoun as ‘moral entrepreneur’, see A. Donajrodzki, *Social Control in 19th-Century Britain* (1977), pp. 54–6. Colquhoun’s career is set out from the point of view of his son-in-law in ‘Iatros’, *A Biographical Sketch*. There are modern appraisals of his work in N. Gash, *Pillars of Government* (1986), pp. 139–52 (sympathetic), and in Paley, ‘Middlesex Justices Act’, pp. 325–61 (sceptical). Colquhoun accepted an honorary vice-presidency of the Vice Society in 1802. For his work in the Bettering Society, see note 22 above, and in education, note 39.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Paley, ‘Middlesex Justices Act’, pp. 224ff., for discussion of the pressures which induced reluctant metropolitan representatives and authorities to accept the Middlesex Justices Act of 1792, the Act under which Colquhoun was employed as a paid magistrate, thus giving him the base from which to collect information and build up his ‘field of expertise’.

From the turn of the new century, however, the usefulness to government of intransigent anti-Jacobin publicists became distinctly less, and the part-sinecure rewards given to men like Bowles an increasing source of embarrassment to their holders. Bowles was publicly disgraced by Henry Thornton's House of Commons finance committee in 1809 and only partially rehabilitated by a court finding a decade later. For most of his working life he took pains to project an image of zealous self-confidence: it was an image masking an agony of spiritual, social and eventually economic insecurity, though none but his wife and his circle of High Church friends ever caught more than a glimpse of this.⁸²

The material which Bowles's career has left behind in evidence of his social attitudes and spiritual state is sufficiently intriguing to tempt an investigator into accepting it as more typical of 'the character of a moral reformer' than even the looser forms of social explanation will allow. The temptation must, of course, be resisted. Yet Bowles's life of fluctuating fortunes, of status insecurity and of over-reward followed by eventual reverse and compensatory idealisation of 'true community' does have its parallels in the lives of other moral reformers. Interestingly, they are more likely to be men in commercial than in professional life. We know, for example, that Bowles's close companion, Joshua Watson, was a wine merchant who retired with great relief from active trade in 1814 to devote the rest of his life to mobilising voluntary support for the Church of England. There is some evidence that he thought himself 'over-fortunate' in his wartime trade dealings as a government contractor, and that the later volunteer exertion was among other things a half-explicit attempt to vindicate a spiritualised version of the social order which had rewarded him so lavishly.⁸³ There may be a similar pattern to be discerned in the life of Anthony Clarke (?-1830), the Evangelical stockbroker who chaired the foundation meeting of the Vice Society, later becoming its (joint) treasurer and one of its chief financial supporters.⁸⁴

More revealing still is the parallel between Bowles and the experiences and reactions of the Quaker pharmaceutical merchant, William Allen (1770-1843). These men were poles apart in religious terms, the one seeking authority in hierarchy, the other in the individual conscience. Their politics diverged in similar fashion, Bowles being an intransigent supporter of Bourbon restoration, Allen being an anti-war liberal with an open distaste for aristocratic parasitism. They were never likely to meet as associates in moral reform either. (Allen's energies, it will be remembered, went first into the Bettering Society, then into Lancasterian Schools.) Yet Allen, for all his sense of calling in his business, and for all his success in it (and in the development of chemistry as a learned

⁸² *Gentleman's Magazine*, 89 (1819), ii.565; Churton, *Watson*, i.85-92. See also Roberts, 'Vice Society', pp. 166-7, 172.

⁸³ Webster, *Joshua Watson*, p. 15.

⁸⁴ Dartmouth MSS, D1778/N/678; *Annual Biography and Obituary*, 20 (1836).

profession), remained insecure – worried when fire threatened to wipe out his warehouse, but equally anxious to avoid the spiritual and social snares of business over-expansion and of undeserved or excessive prosperity. ‘Boom and bust’ stimulated his already volatile emotional and spiritual life, as it did Bowles’s. And both men seem to have come to share a craving for emotional ties based on family or close intimacy between friends. This craving was to express itself in one direction in declarations of deep devotion to the sanctity of marriage and the ideal of home as a place of emotional refuge, in another direction in outbursts of distaste amounting to revulsion for public display of mass emotions, especially those centred on physical brutality to animals.⁸⁵ Both were ‘men of feeling’. Of course, the remedy which each sought as a propitiation of spiritual anguish and emotional discomfort abruptly ends the parallel. Allen was a Dissenter with limited access (as yet) to public authority and little trust in behavioural change enforced without an appeal to the heart. Bowles believed that earthly authority reflected an aspect of the divine plan and was, subject to the continuing worthiness of its representatives, to be upheld for the good of the whole society.⁸⁶

Finally, by way of contrast and control, a note on the activities of those in more secure lines of business. Men of this description certainly took part in the wartime societies. Examples include eminent bankers such as Henry Hoare (1756–1828), senior partner of the Fleet Street family business which traced its ancestry back to the mid-seventeenth century and had, in some of its branches, securely gentrified.⁸⁷ Other examples might be found among the more

⁸⁵ For examples of economic fortunes promoting spiritual introspection, see *Life of William Allen*, i.55, 76. The impact of family events (esp. deaths) in reinforcing his sense of spiritual vocation is deduced from i.27–32, 40, 49, 128–9. (Allen finally freed himself from day-to-day business concerns by taking on his nephew-in-law, Cornelius Hanbury, as a partner in a fusion of economic, family and religious interests of a sort perceptively analysed in Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 215–19.) For evidence of life-long distaste for public brutality, and of concern for animals (also slaves), see *Life*, i.7, 11, 60. For Bowles’s turn-of-century ‘conversion’ to the causes of female modesty and animal protection (though not, it seems, antislavery) see derisive comments in correspondence between his ex-colleague William Cobbett and William Windham: Windham papers, BL Add MS 37853, fos. 66–7.

⁸⁶ Practice and precept, however, had a way of diverging to produce odd outcomes. Allen’s general distaste for aristocratic parasitism did not deter him from accepting in 1813 the task of managing the finances of the duke of Kent back to solvency: *Life of Allen*, i.171. Cf. *Philanthropist*, 2 (1812), p. 337. And Bowles’s reverence for rank and religious orthodoxy did not save him from condemnation as a Methodist and a Leveller when he made less than subtle attempts to warn the Prince of Wales of his moral shortcomings: Bowles, *View of the Moral State of Society*, pp. ix–xi; [Anon], *Letter to a Member of the Vice Society*, p. 10.

⁸⁷ See J. B. Sweet, *A Memoir of the late Henry Hoare* (1869), pp. 73ff. Hoare was a major – and after 1812 a crucial – contributor to the Vice Society’s funds, as well as its treasurer, 1803–28: Hoare’s Bank ledgers. He was also a major contributor to the Bettering Society of which he became a committee member, as well as a foundation vice-president of the (Evangelical) Church Missionary Society, and he had been a member in the 1790s of both the Proclamation Society and the Philanthropic Society.

up-market and better-connected of London's printers and publishers. (Perhaps the most notable of these is Charles Rivington, the younger (1754–1831), co-partner of the firm which acted as semi-official publisher for 'the Church' in the metropolis.⁸⁸) These dynastic figures of irreproachable respectability and solid assets have, in general, left a less revealing store of materials from which to reconstruct their motives and thought patterns. Obviously, however, the sense of duty towards family and dependants, the sense of obligation to transmit an inheritance to posterity, played a large part in encouraging them to maintain a public profile. In some cases the spur to participation gives a strong indication of a desire to emulate the behaviour and assimilate the values of the gentry: the £1,000 donation of the millowning first Sir Robert Peel to the Bettering Society for its work among parish apprentices looks very much like a down-payment on social acceptability among other things. But the Hoares and the Rivingtons of these years had no intention of moving out of business into the life of rural leisure, volunteer magistracy and 'public service' which was still the mark of qualification for inclusion among the landed elite.⁸⁹ Perhaps, among moral reform leaders, the one man who both sought to move back and forth between landed and commercial society, and actually did so without effort, was Thomas Bernard. He, however, was a man with an unusual range of inherited and acquired qualifications on which to draw; and, by the turn of the new century, an unusually relaxed explanation of his motives for action as well:

When I thought I had acquired in my Profession such a competence as satisfied my desires, I determined to quit the Law, and try what useful Occupation I could find that was not likely to increase *l'embarras de richesses*. The Endeavour to meliorate the domestic habits of the labouring class, was the first amusement that occurred.⁹⁰

As this scatter of individual examples makes plain, men came once more to moral reform commitment from a variety of backgrounds down a tangle of paths. It still seems fair to conclude that the war years saw a shift of social energies – or perhaps it was partly a release of energies from groups not previously encouraged to express themselves. Leadership was no longer the monopoly of a polite alliance of gentry and would-be gentry. There were currents in motion sweeping together people who otherwise might have been thought unlikely companions. These people might disagree over religion and over political ideology; they might even be incapable of co-operation within the bounds of a single organisation; but they still agreed in tracing the sources of moral 'weakness'

⁸⁸ S. Rivington, *The Publishing House of Rivington* (1894), pp. 83, 111; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 101 (1831), i.569.

⁸⁹ Cf. N. Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', *Social History*, 4 (1979), pp. 449–52.

⁹⁰ Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 105. Bernard succeeded to the family baronetcy (created for his father) on the death of an elder brother in 1810.

both upwards and downward in their society – to the moral irresponsibility of their ‘betters’ as well as their social inferiors. In a phrase, the war years helped to stimulate a sense of middle-class consciousness and self-assertion even among the supposedly more deferential sections of the metropolitan upper-middle ranks.⁹¹ More evidence of this trend will come to light when we turn to discuss the methods of operation of some key wartime associations.

Moral reform and its critics in an age of crisis management

What differences in approach might be expected from moral reform volunteers in wartime? Proclamation Society leaders, we recall, had an often subtle appreciation of the range of options available but tended, from opportunity and social preference, to look to a reinvigorated magistracy as the key to effective action. The wartime societies, however, drew their support from larger and more socially diverse groups. The Bettering Society partly excepted, they therefore stood in less confident relationship with public authorities than their pre-war counterparts. Links with the political and judicial elite were more tenuous; experience of public administration was more restricted. The sense of living through unprecedented times of crisis was, understandably, greater. In this situation a ‘balanced’ approach to action became much more difficult to maintain. Law enforcement and the emergency relief of distress were the obvious weapons to hand: crisis management took precedence over longer-term projects until a sense of control regained established itself (across southern England at least) in the later years of the war.

Yet if law enforcement was a mood of the moment, it proved as problematic an approach to reform as it had ever done. All the old dilemmas reappeared, often in a more damaging and intractable form. The Vice Society’s dealings with magistrates, for example, bear all too ready comparison with the experience gained by provincial enthusiasts for prosecuting campaigns in the 1780s. Like them, the new society found some early allies among law officers. A sprinkling of metropolitan magistrates even joined the society; and its work received a useful endorsement in 1803 when, in the course of an appeal judgement, Lord Chief Justice Ellenborough declared its work to be both lawful and public-spirited.⁹² (This was a valuable reassurance, given the constraints

⁹¹ Cf. A. Briggs, ‘Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics 1780–1846’, *Past and Present*, no. 9 (1956), pp. 65–74; Emsley, *French Wars*, pp. 159–61; Owen, *English Philanthropy*, pp. 107–8. Cf. also D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class. The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840* (Cambridge, 1995), ch. 5, who argues convincingly that the term ‘middle class’ is a political coinage subject to regular mutation of meaning, but less convincingly that its rhetorical usage was ‘tamed’ to focus on popular radicalism rather than on critique of the political elite during the later war years (p. 188).

⁹² For Lord Ellenborough’s comments, see *Vice Society. Address*, ii.37. For evidence of magistrates’ participation in the society see (*inter alia*) *Statement of Proceedings* (1804), p. 10.

imposed on public combinations in other forms during these years.) But early successes proved frustratingly difficult to consolidate. By 1808, if not earlier, reform enthusiasts came to realise that their standing with magistrates was not a privileged one – that, as their work gained controversial publicity, they must expect to pay a penalty in the form of demands for a better quality of evidence and a raised standard of proof.⁹³

By this time, in fact, the society had been purged of several of its early illusions about the straightforwardness of its work. Criticism of its prosecuting goals and methods began outside its ranks but spread within. The problem was all too predictable. This was a new society of enthusiasts, eager for results and confident that it was well placed to get them. Unlike most magistrates and all parish officers, society agents were not restricted to their own ‘patch’. And, unlike Proclamation Society members, they were numerous enough to attempt an effective campaign of law enforcement across the whole of metropolitan London. Besides, as they believed, their very lack of social exclusivity was in their favour, ‘the more constant residence in town’ of Vice Society members, ‘and their various situations and walks in life’ making it ‘easier for them to keep a watchful eye over the offenders against public morals, and to apply, when needful, the wholesome correction of the laws’.⁹⁴

At first results did come easily. Enthusiastic gentleman volunteers took up the work of public surveillance which parish officers were normally inclined to let slip as too unpopular and unrewarding.⁹⁵ And, for offences which required detection rather than mere observation for their suppression, the buoyant finances of the society permitted the employment of paid agents. It was the paid agents who first brought the society notoriety, though the zealous volunteers also made their contribution.

The trouble with paid agents probably began very early in the life of the society, the pursuit of the ‘hidden offence’ of sale of indecent literature being a well-advertised aspect of the society’s work. Lord Ellenborough helped the process along by a comment in the case already mentioned that entrapment of habitual offenders in activities difficult to evidence was ‘no crime, but a beneficial service to the community’.⁹⁶ Spies and informers, we recall, had an evil reputation in popular legend, and an equivocal one at best in educated thought. Radical exposé of the use government was making of undercover agents in its fight against wartime subversion had, only recently, helped to refurbish the

⁹³ HC SC on Police, *PP* 1817 (484), vii.386–7, 391; *Vice Society. The Trial of Joseph Powell, the Fortune-Teller* (1808), pp. 21, 28. See also *Christian Observer*, 11 (1812), appendix, p. 851.

⁹⁴ *Orthodox Churchman’s Magazine*, 5 (1803), pp. 396–7. Cf. *Vice Society Proposal* (1801), p. 2; and *Address*, i.46–8.

⁹⁵ *Vice Society. Address*, ii.5; *Statement of Proceedings* (1804), p. 4; *Orthodox Churchman’s Magazine*, 5 (1803), pp. 228–9; SC on Police, *PP* 1817 (484), vii.386, 388.

⁹⁶ *Vice Society. Address*, ii.38.

reputation.⁹⁷ It was, therefore, a calculated risk to take Ellenborough's advice at face value but this the committee of the society did in mid-1804. Confident that its subscribers were more interested in ends than in means, it started to proclaim its open acceptance of *agents provocateurs* as legitimate weapons in the fight against concealed vice: 'If the rat is only to be hunted to his hole by the ferret, and iniquity can only be tracked to its burrows, by beings like itself, there is an end of all objection against the use of informers.'⁹⁸ This assertion sent a clear signal to suspicious outsiders. Even more seriously, it alerted the more tenderminded within the society to practices being carried on in their name. Clapham Evangelicals, a late-arriving but determined and well-connected minority within the society, were particularly outraged. The result was a protracted campaign of pamphleteering, lobbying and meetings adjourned in which Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay eventually drove Bowles and his High Church allies to direct negotiation. 'Private meeting about use of fraud', noted Wilberforce on 28 May 1805, 'when came to a compromise by their agreeing not to practise falsehood'.⁹⁹

But public controversy had already left its mark. Support for the society fell away for a time. Momentum lost was never entirely regained. And an opportunity had been created for critics to cast doubt on the validity of the society's whole approach to the reform of morals. The very idea of a prosecuting society – even one tied to the use of gentleman agents – was attacked as a project based on misconception or bad faith. Cobbett, for one, struck a responsive chord in characterising the organisation as 'a standing conspiracy against the quiet and tranquillity of society . . . [giving] the laws . . . an extension and a force which it never was intended they should have'. It was an 'insinuation' on the competence of public officials, he deduced.¹⁰⁰ Other criticism focused on the class bias implicit in the work of a society pledged to enforce only a certain type of law: the Revd Sydney Smith, in a celebrated *Edinburgh Review* article, summed it up as 'a society for suppressing the vices of persons whose income does not exceed 500 l. *per annum*'. Besides, its policies, being attempts to coerce people into a state of outward conformity rather than inward acceptance, were

⁹⁷ At least one Vice Society paid agent was an ex-government undercover agent: see cross-examination of principal witness in Bertazzi's case, *Morning Chronicle*, 1 Dec. 1802, p. 3.

⁹⁸ *Cobbett's Political Register*, 5 (1804), pp. 78–9.

⁹⁹ Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.236. For further detail, see Roberts, 'Vice Society', pp. 169–70. One curious consequence of the 1805 decision against 'falsehood' was the involvement, for a time, of gentleman agents as detectives. For an obscene publications prosecution in which the evidence was collected by Zachary Macaulay and Anthony Clarke, see *The Times*, 6 Dec. 1806, p. 3, and note approval of the change of approach in *Gentleman's Magazine* 76 (1806), ii.1164. The society's later practice is described in *PP* 1817 (484), vii.482. The 1809 Lord's Day Observance Society, formed in reaction against the perceived defects in the Vice Society, banned the use of paid agents altogether: *Christian Observer*, 9 (1810), p. 524.

¹⁰⁰ *Cobbett's Political Register*, 5 (1804), pp. 54–7. Cf. [Anon], *Letter to a Member of the Vice Society*, pp. 15–17, 64.

stratagems more likely to produce a backlash against virtue than a reformation of manners.¹⁰¹

Conspiracy aside, these were serious charges, worth an attempted answer. On evidence supplied by the Vice Society itself, it was certainly a major generator of court business, more so than the Proclamation Society had ever been. It prided itself on adhering to ‘the great rule’ that ‘Prevention is Preferable to Punishment’: it always gave warning before moving on to the prosecution of offences committed in public. (Placard advertisement or personal visit were the methods used in the first instance against London Sunday traders and Brighton naked bathers, for example.) Even so, it clearly did not shrink from taking the step to prosecution, and seems to have adopted it as a weapon of general utility. In the year September 1802 to October 1803, it prosecuted 620 metropolitan shop- and pub-keepers to conviction out of a total of 3,000 or so who had been ‘warned’ of their offence.¹⁰² When the fines imposed under the ancient Act of Charles II proved insufficient to deter Sunday trading offences, the society demanded a revision of the tariff; and when critics deplored the coercion of conscience the society deployed associationist psychological theory to underpin the claim that ‘legal punishment’ and the public shaming which accompanied it could ‘contribute much to individual reformation’.¹⁰³ On the basis of this sort of evidence it seems fair to suggest that Vice Society leaders were unperturbed by the charge of over-prosecution. Even more than their 1780s forebears, they rejected the view that laws were passed without an intention to enforce.

This is not to imply, however, that they rejected symbolic invocations of the law in favour of some Benthamite programme of certainty of apprehension and of punishment. Quite the reverse: the law might not be flouted with impunity but a public recognition of wrong-doing by the offender was, in the case of offences against morals, as good a purgation as any. As much as their ‘tradition-minded’ critics, therefore – as much as any ‘typical eighteenth-century prosecutor’ – Vice Society prosecutors were willing to compromise cases, to drop charges or to intercede over sentencing, so long as a pledge of contrition and an undertaking of future good behaviour could be gained.¹⁰⁴

By contrast, the one criticism which did regularly goad Vice Society publicists into rebuttal was the charge that they prosecuted, not too much, but too selectively. Sydney Smith’s barb about the immunity of those on £500 *per annum* was only the most epigrammatic of a long series of charges which were met and, to a degree, neutralised over the society’s first ten years.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the

¹⁰¹ [Sydney Smith,] *Edinburgh Review*, 13 (1809), pp. 337–8.

¹⁰² *Vice Society. Address*, i.53. For prosecution statistics, see *Address*, ii.11, 87–91.

¹⁰³ *Vice Society. Occasional Report*, no. v, pp. 8–9; *PP* 1817 (484), vii.390.

¹⁰⁴ *Vice Society. Address*, ii.43, but cf. 70–1; *Statement of Proceedings*, p. 8; *Occasional Report*, no. v, pp. 5–6, and no. vi, pp. 2–3; *PP* 1817 (484), vii.482.

¹⁰⁵ E.g., *Annual Review*, 3 (1805), pp. 225–31 at p. 228.

Proclamation Society, the Vice Society felt obliged to make an explicit reply to this line of criticism. It eventually developed a point of view which both satisfied it and acted as a precedent on which future volunteer groups might draw when plagued in their turn with the charge of double standards. First impulses were to rebut the critics by citing examples of law enforcement attempted among ‘the Great’ and the fashionable. (Suppression of indecency at the Opera was cited, and interventions to prevent Sunday work at Windsor Castle advertised.) But this was not a promising way to defeat critics: after all, no prosecutions were involved and success, if achieved, depended on the exertion of ‘influence’ which, in the Vice Society’s case, could seldom be guaranteed.¹⁰⁶

A more effective way out was to turn criticism back on itself – to inquire of the ‘respectable’ whether they were really prepared to follow the logic of their demands to the point where they undermined the conventions of domestic privacy and household hierarchy on which normal life for the middle ranks was assumed to rest:

To advertize the Magistrate of attempts to make the Sabbath a day of traffick . . . and to notice profane swearing; do not require any thing which can lessen social confidence, any betrayal of trust, nor any thing which debases the character, or corrupts the heart of the party, who seeks the due observance of the Laws. But to inspect the *private* life, to pry into the *private* conduct of Individuals, whether poor or rich, would loosen the bonds of social intercourse, and could only be done by betraying the confidence of duty or of friendship.¹⁰⁷

There were still problems lurking in this formulation. Where, in particular, were the boundaries of ‘the private conduct of Individuals’ to be set? The really rich or really poor, it could be argued, had little opportunity for private conduct, the rich setting an example in spite of themselves, the poor arousing concern by their very inability to control their lives in this compartmental way. Vice Society leaders made an implicit admission of these points on occasion.¹⁰⁸ The formulation was, all the same, a promising way around an otherwise damaging point of tension. It fitted well with a spreading enthusiasm for the domestic environment as a moralising force in its own right. And its talk of ‘social confidence’ brings us back to a central concern of moral reformers during these years, for wartime enthusiasts in the cause were haunted by a sense of social relationships in decay.

Even more than those who came before them, volunteers of the wartime generation were driven forward by the vision of a society in which the bonds of a supposedly once-existing moral community had been restored – a society

¹⁰⁶ *Vice Society. Statement of Proceedings*, p. 9; *Occasional Report* (1805), pp. 9–10.

¹⁰⁷ *Occasional Report*, no. v, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ See, e.g., Bowles, *View of the Moral State of Society* (1804 edn), preface, pp. ix–xi; *Vice Society. Occasional Report*, no. vi, p. 2.

in which all social ranks maintained relationships of mutual respect and concern. The goal was, of course, easier to conjure up in rhetoric than to define in practice: one person's 'restoration' was another's unhallowed innovation, as the Vice Society found in facing its critics. Nevertheless the search for a strategy to restore a hierarchical social order based on mutual moral obligation continued as experiment was made with a variety of methods of social intervention. One line of approach was the coercive. Other complementary approaches were not.

Of these other lines of approach we have already taken the opportunity to trace the wartime revival of interest in volunteer schemes to give formal schooling to the children of the poor. We have also had something to say about schemes of charitable relief and management. In fact it is the latter set of projects which gives the clearest indication of the strength of feeling lying behind the drive towards 'moral community restored'. Schooling, in this age of system-patenting publicists, was an activity increasingly accepted as involving a necessary division of labour and delegation of role. (That is, volunteers combined to pay for premises and to employ a teacher rather than becoming instructors themselves.) The relief of distress, on the other hand, was a task not yet accepted as open to delegated solutions. There was if anything during these years an attempt being made by key volunteer organisers to halt the spread of impersonal or narrowly institutional relief – to retrace supposedly incautious steps taken towards indiscriminating benevolence by short-sighted sentimentalists, and to make a fresh start on the basis of personal relationship re-established between giver and receiver.

A first casualty in this process of reappraisal was the moral status of the poor law. While previous critics of the poor law had striven to overhaul its machinery to make the delivery of services more professional and cost-efficient, critics by the turn of the new century were tending to the view that the system itself was a mistake. This was partly the result of despair that overburdened and underfunded state institutions could ever meet the institutional standards now set down as necessary for success in the task of reformation of character. 'Nothing is so hostile to the morals and the habits of the poor as congregating under one roof, the idle, the infirm, and the dissolute', warned Bernard in a direct echo of John Howard on prisons.¹⁰⁹ The change in attitude was even more the result of experience of 1790s use of the poor laws as a social pacifier, and in particular a response to the spread of the 'Speenhamland system' of outdoor relief through wage supplementation. Such a system of impersonally bestowed relief might buy short-term peace, warned William Allen but, in the longer term, it could only result in a culture of dependence, 'maintain[ing] beggary and vice, and

¹⁰⁹ *Bettering Society. Reports*, v.22. But Bernard did not advocate the abolition of the poor law: see pp. 52–4, and cf. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 96–7, 196–7.

foster[ing] those habits of immorality, ignorance, and insubordination which, when they rise to a certain height, endanger the existence of civilised society'.¹¹⁰

If the poor law was a morally defective institution, perhaps incurably so, then the volunteer alternative for the relief of distress was necessarily to be preferred and not just for its negative strengths but also for the positive opportunities it gave donors to express and exercise their own moral sensibilities. Yet even under a volunteer system there were traps for the unwary. Like all volunteers, wartime philanthropic organisers swung compulsively between the fear of failing to mobilise resources and the fear of failing to distribute them to greatest effect but, having experienced the charitable flood of the mid and late 1790s, they seem on balance to have been more impressed by the impulsiveness of donors than by their hardness of heart. To counterbalance the risk of demoralising the receivers of charitable relief – of reducing them to a state of permanent or habitual incapacity – wartime publicists and organisers set about a series of inquiries and experiments which, to a remarkable extent, anticipate the supposed innovations of associations such as the Charity Organisation Society, founded seventy years later.

A preliminary step in the task involved the 'education' of givers to a recognition that 'real charity does not solely consist in giving money'. Not only might the motive for such self-advertising behaviour be less than pure but, in an impersonal urban context, the effect might be the reverse of the donor's intention. As Wilberforce noted, 'It is one of the grievances of a great city, that one is often, not without reason, doubtful whether money given away is not on the whole more injurious than beneficial.'¹¹¹ The preferable approach was one which showed a continuing concern to sustain both the physical well-being and the character of the person being assisted. This might involve the donor in quite long-term projects of socialisation and monitored subsidy. By one route, the poor might be encouraged to spend their resources more prudently. (Bernard, for example, gave much emphasis to diversification of diet, hoping to add fish to the more culturally acceptable but price-vulnerable staples of grain and meat.) From another angle, those in a position to cushion the poor against unforeseeable fluctuations in employment, wages and prices, ought to do so by sponsoring bulk purchase of staples, the erection of communal mills and bake-houses, and the establishment of reliably managed friendly societies and savings schemes.¹¹² In this way, it was hoped, the poor might be nudged in the direction of a culture predisposed to value domesticity, deferred gratification and prudent foresight. This culture could then be expected to strengthen their resolve to maintain moral responsibility for their social obligations in times of

¹¹⁰ *Philanthropist*, 2 (1812), p. 191.

¹¹¹ Wilberforce, *Life*, iii.25, Wilberforce to Lord Muncaster, 15 Jan. 1802. Cf. *Philanthropist*, 1 (1811), p. 4.

¹¹² *Bettering Society. Reports*, i.417; ii.19–20; iii.29–35.

hardship. It would also give a secure base from which to 'better their condition' (or that of their children), should times improve, for, as Bernard noted, increased material prosperity unsupported by a 'melioration' of 'moral character . . . will often administer a supply to vice, rather than a relief to necessity'.¹¹³

Nevertheless, there was no avoiding the realisation that the poor faced recurrent crises of subsistence which the practice of moral virtue alone could not resolve. War, dearth and bad seasons, trade slumps or gluts in the labour market were all widely recognised to cause distress demanding immediate material relief.¹¹⁴ Under these circumstances it was the duty of the better-off to give, and to give generously. This did not mean, though, that the attempt to calculate effects was to be set aside. Undiscriminating charity was still to be deplored for its pauperising potential: the object was to save 'the industrious mechanic' or labourer from being 'utterly crushed, with his spirits . . . broken' to the point where he gave up trying to regain a state of moral responsibility for his actions. To decide, under emergency conditions, who fell within the prescribed limits and then to work out how best to protect the urge to retain respectability from erosion or extinction were tasks which imposed very fierce strains indeed on attempts to blend benevolent impulse with 'science'. While personal assessment of individual situations seemed even more necessary than usual, the public situation of mass destitution and disorder virtually dictated impersonal, unmonitored response.¹¹⁵

The problem of relieving mass distress certainly cast a continuing fascination over the minds as well as the emotions of wartime publicists of philanthropic causes. Broadly speaking, the way forward seemed to involve two complementary approaches. Each, paradoxically, required the acceptance of a degree of professional expertise to achieve its goal of social reconciliation. The first approach required the systematic collection of information. Without this, no reliable judgement could be made about the extent of distress in any area and no opinion formed about the limits of the individual's capacity for self-help. Knowledge of this sort also helped volunteer and official agencies to plan the scale and direct, to a degree, the application of resources to areas of greatest perceived need. Thus we find the Bettering Society first sponsoring, then combining with the Home Office to subsidise, the surveys of metropolitan destitution carried out by Matthew ('Mendicity') Martin between 1796 and 1811.¹¹⁶ The successor organisation, the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor, also laid stress on the need for information to precede action so that otherwise haphazard volunteer effort could be co-ordinated and, where necessary, pump-primed into effective local action.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, v.47. ¹¹⁴ Cf. Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 15–16, 98–100.

¹¹⁵ See, e.g., Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, pp. 96–8.

¹¹⁶ *Bettering Society Reports*, i.166; HC SC on Mendicity, *PP* 1814–15 (473), iii.231ff, appendices 2–4.

¹¹⁷ *Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor Reports*, i (1813), 11–14.

If investigation was to precede relief, however, it was also to follow it, and the various schemes to monitor the effects of relief in these years are particularly notable. The most ambitious of all was that developed by William Allen and some of his Quaker colleagues to accompany the distribution of charitable relief to the poor of east London. Shortly after the setting up of the Spitalfields Soup Charity in December 1797, Allen proposed to the committee ‘a plan of keeping a book, and making domiciliary visits to the cases [sic], but was negatived on account of the trouble’.¹¹⁸ As so often was to happen, the wave of need swept in too swiftly and too strongly during the winter of 1797–8 for organisers to channel it. With parish resources past breaking point in much of the East End and the prospect of beggars appearing in streets across the metropolis, Allen and his friends had to be content with a half-way solution – an adaptation of the relatively conventional practice of giving relief to those introduced to the charity by subscriber ticket. Subscribers were exhorted to make personal inquiry before making the recommendation. In this way the charity built up a file on 3,000 families whose ‘cases’ had ‘in most instances’ been ‘inquired into, as far as is practicable’. Their pioneering efforts were duly publicised on Bernard’s public notice-board, the reports of the Bettering Society.¹¹⁹ The work continued for several years until distress peaked again in 1801. In the years which followed, the sense of urgency slipped away along with some of the anxiety which had generated it and the precedent fell from view.

In 1811, however, distress returned to the East End and also to industrial centres in provincial England, and this time Allen was fully prepared. The Spitalfields Soup Charity was duly revived in 1811–12 and its promoters persuaded to adopt the system they had rejected as impracticable in 1798. The voluntary principle was at last to be disciplined to professional standards by combining the distribution of relief with a systematic survey of the domestic, financial and moral resources of those relieved. The surveyors were volunteers but they worked as a co-ordinated team, visiting by rotation to spread the burden, dividing responsibility for investigation between a network of district panels, and transmitting their information back to a central file. (An innovation since the original scheme of 1798 was the inclusion of a ladies’ committee for investigation of specifically female forms of destitution such as those associated with ‘lying in’.) Allen was the first keeper of the central file: its cumulative effect, he records, ‘much depressed my spirits’. He was also one of the first of the domestic visitors under this scheme, recording his first inspection of Spitalfields ‘cases’ in the company of Thomas Fowell Buxton on 18 May 1812.¹²⁰ An enterprising attempt to have the scheme recommended as the preferred model of organisation for the otherwise decentralised activities of the Association for

¹¹⁸ *Life of William Allen*, i.36.

¹¹⁹ *Philanthropist*, 2 (1812), pp. 173–96 at pp. 173–5; *Bettering Society Reports*, i.303–12.

¹²⁰ *Life of Allen*, i.143, 146; *Philanthropist*, 2 (1812), pp. 175, 184.

the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor also helped to spread the message.¹²¹ This national body, as we have seen, was no unqualified success, and we have no hard evidence that the casework brief was systematically adopted. Probably it was not. But the idea was altogether too promising a resolution of a continuing dilemma for it to fade far from view. From one vantage point it could be presented as the key to harmonising the charitable intention of the giver with the moral welfare of the receiver. From another it was a means of reconciling the ideal of personal commitment with the apparently competing ideal of impersonal application of professional expertise. It was a plan of action with an assured, if discontinuous, future. Many times rediscovered, it was to prove easier to publicise than to implement, but it went to the heart of the volunteer vision of social and moral regeneration.

From this extended but less than exhaustive survey of moral reform activities in wartime one point at least registers itself with some force. The number of citizens taking part in volunteer associations with moral reform goals greatly increases. The eagerness of the leaders of these associations to extend the social range of their support also grows – perhaps even more than the London-centred documentation relied on here fully reveals. It is true that the ideological tensions generated by war and domestic dislocation did, for a time, put pressure on the more defensive of these groups to limit recruitment. In the more alarming early stages of the French wars, indeed, volunteer association was potentially such a threatening manoeuvre that its use for purposes not approved by public authorities and patriotic opinion became as good as impossible.¹²² Yet, as the fight against the seemingly international conspiracy of Jacobin attitudes swung round to redefine itself as a more traditional contest in defence of ‘national safety’, volunteer initiative reasserted itself almost as part of the national cultural baggage to be defended. The result was the beginning of a remarkable era of sectarian competition during which supporters of traditional hierarchies in Church and state were urged to mobilise in ways once dismissed as worthy of practice only by their opponents. Some objects Churchmen appropriated entirely to themselves, arguing that the national heritage, moral, religious and political, was indivisible. But the result was not so much to deter puritan or rationalist campaigners for moral self-control as to deflect them into longer-term projects of systematic religious and moral socialisation.

¹²¹ *Philanthropist*, 2 (1812), pp. 233, 235. Cf. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, p. 199.

¹²² Note especially the strenuous and generally successful attempts of the worldly-wise parliamentary leaders of the antislave trade movement to warn provincial enthusiasts against mass petitioning or any other activity capable of being interpreted as unpatriotic: S. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery. British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (1986), p. 221, n. 65; B. Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (1984), p. 32.

By the end of the war, as the perceived threat to ‘national’ cultural values receded, both orthodoxy and Dissent found themselves competing with one another in a range of activities which increasingly overlapped. This is not to suggest that the war-conditioned charges laid by each against the other – and by outsiders against both – entirely faded away. One side continued to claim that the other was altogether too permissive and therefore open to capture for fanatical or socially subversive purposes; and the other side still retorted that the first was far too ready to impose a purely external uniformity by means of coercion or of conscience-stunting indoctrination. But behind the sectarian front, volunteer associations on both sides shared more by way of implicit assumption and attitude than they fully spelled out.

By taking the opportunity which wartime home-front mobilisation offered, the members of the commercial and professional classes (predominantly metropolitan) who formed the backbone of the new societies had laid down a firm claim. It was they, and people from backgrounds like theirs, who were best fitted to give moral leadership in the new age of expanded temptation and risk. Seen from one angle it might be said that they were putting themselves forward as modernising paternalists – would-be gentry adapting the role to urban commercial conditions – and this is certainly part of the picture. Yet it would be a mistake to overlook the extent to which many wartime volunteers were in implicit or open conflict with gentry values and capable of withstanding attempts to incorporate them in old networks of influence and hierarchies of status. No doubt this is partly to be explained in terms of the re-emergence, under the pressure of world-shaking events, of puritan convictions about the destiny of a chosen people. It was also the result in even greater part of fascination with the possibilities of social regeneration brought about by the application of professional expertise and ‘businesslike’ techniques of social management. This fascination was to achieve fullest release, however, only after the patriotic and sectarian impulses of the wartime years had been given time to decay.

The years which followed the close of the French wars have always presented historians with something of a labelling problem. Are they best identified as a last declining phase of England's *ancien régime*, or as the seed-bed of a modernised Victorian society to come? Both labels catch a good part of the whole: neither catches all of it. The true character of the times was also a puzzle to contemporaries, often an alarming one. The external threat to stability was gone, yet the years of Spa Fields, Peterloo, Cato Street, Queen Caroline, Catholic Emancipation, Captain Swing and the Reform bill agitations (not to mention the onset of the first discernible modern trade cycles) were years hardly in danger of being called stable by anyone who had lived through them. Most members of the opinion-forming classes sensed a society adrift from precedent and past certainties. Some of them went further, to diagnose decay of respect for old ways as a potentially terminal social illness. Others claimed it as a necessary condition of social renewal, an uncomfortable but morally invigorating phase of the struggle to shape a 'more enlightened, more virtuous, and more happy' society.¹ As we shall find, it was the latter who came to dominate over the post-war period as a whole, though not without recurrent challenges at moments of social and cultural emergency.

Restoration versus renovation: contexts of post-war concern

Whatever the diagnosis, it encouraged a continuing interest in the direction and quality of national morals. And, in contrast to the selectively released energies of the wartime decades, the years from the war's end to the passing of the New Poor Law in 1834 were years in which the free market came into its own: as in the economic sphere, so too in the world of volunteer association.

There are several reasons why this should have been so. The first concerns trends in national religious life. In wartime, as we know, it had often been difficult for religious 'deviants' to establish credentials as acceptable reformers

¹ J. J. Gurney to Buxton, 8 July 1818, in C. Buxton (ed.), *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton Bart.* (2nd edn, 1849), p. 83. Cf. evidence of George Pritchard, secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, to HC SC on the Police of the Metropolis, *PP* 1817 (484), vii.391.

of morals. After 1815 it became easier. The notion that Churchmen were the only true patriots, the only safe citizens, did not die away altogether, but it was increasingly overlaid by a class-coloured perception of a shared moral mission open to the socially reliable of all (Protestant) religious backgrounds. A parallel line of thinking in politics led in 1828 to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the formal admission of Protestant Dissenters to full citizenship. The granting of Catholic Emancipation in the following year came for rather different reasons: the extent to which that adjustment helped to revive the view that moral fitness depended on religious orthodoxy will be set out in due course.

In general terms, however, the leading moral reform organisers of these years more or less naturally found themselves admiring and imitating a model of mobilisation developed by the great evangelical missions of spiritual reclamation in the latter years of the war. The model (developed in its purest form by the Bible Society) relied for its success on two features – the blending of Churchman and Dissenter in a common, evangelising cause, and the sponsorship of a national system of ‘auxiliary associations’ to allow the tapping of the energies and resources of supporters drawn from social ranks unable to afford large annual subscriptions. This was a model especially suited to the requirements of the antislavery movement as it emerged in the 1820s. It was also an inspiration for other groups aiming to act as cultural missionaries in post-war urban England.²

Of course, some of these groups were far from approving of promiscuous evangelical ecumenism as a basis for their efforts. Yet, even where distaste for co-operating with schismatics continued to overcome the evangelical urge to spread salvation, the existence of associations competing to reach near-identical social goals could now sometimes be accepted as a healthy means of maximising coverage rather than as a duel between the forces of darkness and light. And, if that argument failed to convince, there was still in reserve the argument of fear – the fear that work half-done was work set aside at one’s peril. (This was notably the case in the field of working-class literacy: rival volunteer organisations having entered the market for the supply of elementary education now called for support to ensure that literacy did not of itself corrupt.)³

Yet another encouragement to volunteer action during the post-war period was a change in attitude towards the exercise of secular state authority. One notable sign of these times is generally admitted to be a rising intolerance among the propertied classes of public disorder and ineffectual public administration. So it was that, between the closing years of the war and the

² Canton, *History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, i.47–61 (esp. 50–1), 324. For general appraisal of the Bible Society’s example-setting role, see Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 128.

³ Canton, *Bible Society*, i.305, 325; *Quarterly Review*, 22 (1820), p. 556; *Evangelical Magazine*, 27 (1819), p. 423; *Christian Observer*, 30 (1830), p. 762.

mid-1830s, police, poor law and prison reform all returned to the agenda of public debate. Exchanges of view on the moral foundations and legitimate purposes of state institutions of social discipline gained attention in a way not seen since the 1780s. This time round debate was rather more likely to end in formal resolution.

The first debate to resolve itself in this way was the one over urban policing. There were pressing material reasons for this. The years 1811–21 experienced an all-time recorded peak in the rate of population growth (a 16 per cent increase over the decade). Five years later came the peak in the proportion of non-adults in the population (40 per cent under fifteen years in 1826). Strains of growth were themselves intensified by strains of redistribution – the migration of ‘surplus’ rural populations into the urban labour market (and, in times of trade down-turn, sometimes back again).⁴ With all this taking place in a climate of 1790s-shaped ideological apprehension, it is not difficult to explain why ‘public opinion’ of the 1820s started to accept what the 1780s had largely rejected. The key converts to the ideal of state-directed police reform seem to have made up their minds around the time of the Queen Caroline disorders, though it took Robert Peel until 1829 to argue the Metropolitan Police Act onto the statute book. (Standards set by Peel’s Act thereafter spread steadily through urban provincial England in the early Victorian years.⁵) In the meanwhile volunteer policing agencies enjoyed something of a golden age. Some were tolerated as stop-gaps, others were accepted as modernising forces in their own right, and some (of both varieties) received open encouragement from state authorities eager to spread responsibility for enforcing public discipline in times of social tension.

As with police reform, so too with poor law reform. The propertied classes looked to the dramatic rise in national spending on poor relief between 1814 and 1818 (and again between 1827 and the early 1830s) and reacted ultimately in the same direction as in the police debate. They took longer to do it but, by 1834, a majority had accepted the case for structural administrative change. Yet, if solutions to the problem of urban policing had been difficult enough to ‘sell’, solutions to problems of relieving poverty were even more morally sensitive. How much moral responsibility had the well-off for the well-being of the poor? How much responsibility was it reasonable/prudent to expect the poor to shoulder for themselves? Was labour mobility to be valued above social stability? What responsibility should ratepayers take for the effects of the trade cycle on patterns of urban employment? Was it ‘real charity’ to give indiscriminately to a street beggar without regard to the potentially corrupting effect of the gift on the character of the recipient? In short, how were these varied shadings of threat and reproach to the moral order to be dealt with without undermining the incentive to moral self-management of the labouring population in general?

⁴ Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*, pp. 212, 217.

⁵ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp. 190–1, 288–9.

What, indeed, *was* the moral order being sought? Did it value respect, obedience and acceptance of station in life, or ambition, innovation and pride in personal achievement? These dilemmas were not new, but seemed to be becoming more acute as changing material conditions met changed attitudes to social hierarchy and the limits of state competence.⁶ This, if any time ever was, was the period in which awakened evangelical and romantic sensibility struggled to find accommodation with the self-regulating – some said self-punishing – system of political economy expounded by Malthus and Ricardo (and used as a policy guide by post-war, market-respecting Tory governments).⁷ Much of this search for accommodation was made by way of volunteer experiment.

A final encouragement to volunteer action was provided by the realisation of the potential for moral subversion presented by the post-war expansion of commercial life itself – the generation of anxieties focused on the vulnerability of the labouring classes as consumers. The stereotypes of excessive indulgence of appetite, we know, were already well developed in pre-war England. Post-war critics of urban working-class consumption patterns and leisure behaviour do seem, however, to have been more sensitive to the part played by systematic commercial stimulation in the creation of working-class ‘demand’ than their pre-war counterparts had been.⁸ Sometimes this made them see commercially motivated conspiracy to corrupt when other explanations seem more plausible in hindsight. (The wave of concern about the spread of metropolitan prostitution, for example, which rose and sank between the later war years and the early 1820s, ties much more neatly to trends in wage levels and employment opportunities than to any demonstrable commercial promotion of the trade.) At other times, the high visibility of a commercial promotion might be misinterpreted as an indication of general trends in consumption less easily measured. (The classic example here was the alarm triggered by the mid-1820s appearance in London of the lavishly capitalised ‘gin palace’ at a time when national per capita spirit consumption was already showing signs of steady long-term decline.⁹)

⁶ P. Thane, ‘Government and Society in England and Wales, 1750–1914’, *CSHB*, iii. 14–15.

⁷ For trends in post-war poor law expenditure, see J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism. English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795–1834* (1969), pp. 276–82. For assessment of the Malthusian and Ricardian impact on the world of philanthropy and public policy, see *ibid.*, ch. 6; Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, ch. 3; G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty. England in the Early Industrial Age* (1984), ch. 5, esp. pp. 133, 143; D. Winch, *Riches and Poverty. An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 11.

⁸ E.g., *Report of the Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis* (1816), pp. 12–13; *Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline. [PDS] Seventh Report* (1827), pp. 73–5.

⁹ On prostitution, cf. allegations of commercialisation made in *The Guardian Society for the Preservation of Public Morals. Report of the Provisional Committee* (1816), p. 22; and S. Nash, ‘Social Attitudes towards Prostitution in London from 1752 to 1829’ (New York University Ph.D., 1980), pp. 111–14. On gin palaces, cf. *British and Foreign Temperance Society [BFTS] First Report* (1832), p. 82; and Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 65.

These provisos aside, it is difficult to doubt that contemporaries were right in detecting a major expansion of commercial attempts to capture the surplus (and not so surplus) income of the labouring classes. The results in urban areas were usually most noticeable on Sundays. This was to prove a fact of crucial importance to the rekindling of sabbatarianism in the later 1820s, but the blending of an increasingly class-segregated drink trade with 'brutish sports', betting and the depraved delights of the Sunday newspaper press was a compounding of cultural danger signals which individual observers on their way home from morning service were noting long before then.¹⁰

As in other areas of moral concern, however, a large part of the reaction against working-class consumer appetites is to be interpreted as a changing of expectation as well as of consumption patterns. Nowhere was this more apparent than in post-war concern about the moral health of family life. It will be recalled how wartime conditions had contributed to a sharpening of gender role distinctions. The making of the middle-class family ideal continued apace in the immediate post-war decades with the result that, not only did opportunity for many forms of informal cross-class contact decrease, but standards of decent behaviour between labouring and non-labouring strata of the population diverged. If morality was to be defined in terms of respect for the female nurturing role, segregation of 'innocent' family dependants from coarsening contact with the labour market and with the unregulated public arena, and of commitment to the private or domestic setting as the cradle of moral sensibilities – if morality was, in short, to be privatised – then large portions of the leisure culture and, indeed, child-rearing habits of the labouring classes became morally problematic by virtue of remaining public and communal.¹¹ Much moral reform effort, then, even in the more settled stretches of the 1820s and 1830s, was put into schemes of re-establishing contact between classes in order to strengthen the capacity of the individual to make responsible decisions in the market choices now available and in order to guide consumption patterns into more promising paths for the future. This latter objective, it is worth noting, marked a break with a dominant assumption of most moral reform social analysis from the recallable past – the assumption that luxury consumption was morally wrong for the poor because it had always to be at the expense of ultimate necessity. By the 1830s some reformers at least were preaching the message that the furnishing of a comfortable and 'leisure-friendly' domestic environment for the working-class family was a morally positive goal to endorse.¹²

¹⁰ *PP* 1817 (484), vii.388; *Philanthropic Gazette*, 26 Feb. 1817, p. 72. Cf. *Christian Instruction Society. A Statement on the Awful Profanation of the Lord's Day* (2nd edn, 1829), pp. 1–5.

¹¹ M. Roberts, 'Public and Private in Early 19th-Century London: The Vagrant Act of 1822 and its Enforcement', *Social History*, 13 (1988), pp. 290–4; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 359–69, 404–5.

¹² *BFTS. Fourth Report* (1835), p. 132 (speech of J. S. Buckingham). See also *First Report* (1832), p. 14; Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 94–5.

These, then, were some major preconditions and encouragements to the expression of moral reform anxieties and hopes. The clearest way to demonstrate the vigour of moral reform impulses, however, is to list and explore the fortunes of the new range of associations which sprang into existence during these years.

Reclaiming the metropolis: London 1815–1820

The first anxieties to register were, as always at the end of a war, those aroused by the problem of absorbing and resocialising demobilised troops – and of doing this under the conditions of trade depression, domestic unemployment and market dislocation which also went with the end of wars. In 1814–15 the transition from war to peace was further complicated by being carried out against the backdrop of the population shift and labour market deregulation already described. In 1816 came the added misfortune of a poor harvest.

By 1818 the number of committals for indictable offences was more than double the 1814 figure, its steepest rise in the century. National spending on poor relief stood at eight million pounds, up from £5.4 million in 1814–15; and habeas corpus had been suspended since the previous year in response to signs of receptiveness among disaffected subjects to a revived campaign of populist political radicalism.¹³ Meanwhile a running series of parliamentary committees was taking evidence on the state of the morally defective culture which, it seemed, underlay the symptoms of social disorder.¹⁴ Witnesses before these inquiries included representatives of a whole new generation of moral reform associations, all eager to advertise their anxieties, activities and ideas. Their immediate specialist concerns – prostitution, juvenile crime, prison discipline, public begging – give some clues to the way in which the propertied classes of London and the larger provincial centres were registering and interpreting the moral signs of the times.

The earliest of the new causes to gain a public identity was, in origin and outlook, the most traditional. This was the Guardian Society for the Preservation of Public Morals, a non-sectarian body pledged to the work of suppressing London brothels and of apprehending and reclaiming street prostitutes. Like the Vice Society (but in a less ideologically charged context), the Guardian Society began as a reputable residents' action group concerned to ensure the

¹³ Gatrell and Hadden, 'Criminal Statistics and their Interpretation', pp. 352, 392; P. King and J. Noel, 'The Origins of "The Problem of Juvenile Delinquency": The Growth of Juvenile Prosecutions in London in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries', *Criminal Justice History* 14 (1993), pp. 21–2; Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, p. 281; Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp. 166–71, 184.

¹⁴ D. Eastwood, "'Amplifying the Province of the Legislature": The Flow of Information and the English State in the Early 19th Century', *Historical Research*, 62 (1989), pp. 276–94.

enforcement of otherwise neglected laws ‘relative to moral order’ in an administratively fragmented metropolis.¹⁵ The society claimed to have begun work as early as 1812. This makes good sense as it ties the initiative to the opportunity created by the involuntary contraction of the operations of the Vice Society.¹⁶ Of equal significance, it links the onset of concern with the 1811–12 slump in the London labour market and with the 1812 revival of interest in police reform which followed the horrifying Ratchiff Highway murders.¹⁷

As the society retained what it called a ‘provisional committee’ until 1815, however, it seems only to have launched itself in permanent associational form at that point. Its leaders certainly became more publicly explicit about their wider goals in the post-war years than they had before, advertising their work as an attempt to disrupt the metropolitan criminal sub-culture at one of its sources as well as to prevent the embarrassments to ‘moral feeling and social order’ presented ‘in our public streets, and at midday, by obstreperous Females’.¹⁸ The appeal of such a campaign was clearly considerable in the immediate post-war years when the society felt confident enough to claim to act on behalf of ‘the good of all classes’. The circle of committed supporters was, all the same, far more restricted. Slightly fewer than five hundred contributed to its funds during its peak year of activity in 1816, and attempts to extend branch activities beyond the City and Westminster into the East End proved a disappointment.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the society’s core group of City business supporters are unlikely to have found these limits to growth unduly disturbing, given their preferred ‘insider’ methods of operation. Even more than the Vice Society, the Guardian Society took its task to be one of pressing civic authorities to do their duty. The conscription of the Lord Mayor and officers of the City of London, not to mention the access gained to ratepayer funds, for a few years gave the society real influence over standards of law enforcement in areas under City jurisdiction. Such support freed it to apply its own resources to the collection of information and the lobbying of magistrates and MPs for simplified and more summary methods of law enforcement.²⁰

The insider approach also opened (via the City Bridewell) opportunities for the recruitment of clients to the charitable branch of its activities – the reclamation of prostitutes. The society was not as immediately successful in this work as in its policing activity: it demanded of applicants ‘a broken and contrite spirit’

¹⁵ *Guardian Society. Report* (1816), pp. 5–8, 12–13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9. For Vice Society admission of its inactivity as a brothel-suppressing agency, see HC SC on Police, *PP* 1817 (484), vii.532–3. Note, however, that the Guardian Society’s treasurer for 1815 was W. H. Hoare, son of Henry Hoare, long-standing treasurer of the Vice Society.

¹⁷ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp. 164ff.

¹⁸ *Guardian Society. Report* (1817), p. 11. See also pp. 10, 21–2, 25.

¹⁹ *Report* (1816), pp. 26–7, 51–67; *Report* (1817), p. 11.

²⁰ *Report* (1816), pp. 10–13; *Report* (1817), pp. 15–19; HC SC on Police, *PP* 1817 (484), vii.458–65.

of a sort several degrees more abject than that required by existing charities in the field.²¹ This, though, was the field in which it was finally to locate its reason for permanent existence as its policing function fell away.²² It also engaged the society in work which guaranteed it the support, not merely of ratepayers in search of law and order solutions to public nuisances, but of evangelicals in search of common ground with ‘fellow sinners’ whose attempted reclamation would stand as evidence of the sincerity of intention of the privileged to repair the results of their ‘neglect’ of the lower orders and thus pave the way for the restoration of social trust between classes.²³ The emergence of the doctrine of cross-class ‘sympathy’ is, however, one more fruitfully studied in the activities of other volunteer groups – most notably the Prison Discipline Society and the Mendicity Society.

These two societies, both founded in 1818, are recognisable from the start as responses to social dislocation more intellectually complex and self-conscious than law and order improvisations of the Guardian Society type. This is not to underplay the importance of post-war conditions in giving individuals a motive for combined action. In the case of the Prison Discipline Society the original encouragement to action had been the ‘discovery’ of a sub-culture of crime and vagrancy among post-war metropolitan juveniles. An embryo version of the society had in fact been set up as early as 1815 in the depths of the post-war depression when concern about a collapse in respect for property rights and social discipline among the metropolitan labouring classes was first being registered. This was the Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis.²⁴ Key members of this committee were then led on to wider concerns by exposure to the practical realities of the unsegregated and overcrowded institutions into which the teeming masses of offenders were packed for storage or supposed punishment.²⁵

The Society for the Suppression of Mendicity was also a response to immediate post-war stimuli – in its case the ‘distressing and alarming’ upsurge of

²¹ *Guardian Society. Report* (1817), p. 20. Cf. S. Nash, ‘Prostitution and Charity: The Magdalen Hospital, a Case Study’, *Journal of Social History*, 17 (1984), pp. 617–28.

²² Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 144–5.

²³ E.g., Revd Daniel Wilson, in *Guardian Society. Report* (1816), p. 44.

²⁴ *Juvenile Delinquency Committee Report* (1816), pp. 10–13; *PDS. First Report* (1818), p. 13.

²⁵ *Life of William Allen*, i.228; T. F. Buxton, *An Inquiry Whether Crime and Misery are Produced or Prevented by our Present System of Prison Discipline* (6th edn, 1818), pp. iii, 20, 23, 110; HC SC on Prisons, *PP* 1818 (275), viii.67–73 (evidence of Peter Bedford). For conceptually sophisticated explorations of the extent to which the ‘discovery’ of juvenile crime at this time was the result of ‘real’ changes in patterns of behaviour of urban juveniles as contrasted with changes in the perception and tolerance thresholds of urban observers, see P. King, ‘The Rise of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1780–1840: Changing Patterns of Perception and Prosecution’, *Past and Present* no. 160 (1998), pp. 116–40, esp. pp. 128–32; H. Shore, *Artful Dodgers. Youth and Crime in Early 19th-Century London* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1999), pp. 172–3 (table 12), and pp. 20ff.

street begging by which, it was feared, successful deceivers could earn more than the wages of honest industry. This helps to explain why the very earliest of Commons select committees on post-war social problems had been devoted to the study of ‘mendicity in the metropolis’. It was only after it became clear that the retrenching government of Lord Liverpool was not going to act on the committee’s hesitant suggestion that the regulation of the problem be added to the responsibilities of police magistrates that a volunteer move was made in London to meet the continuing challenge.²⁶

These, then, were clear attempts to restore social discipline. Yet they were more than this for, as their definition of goals shows, there was a modernising element in their aims and methods. For the Prison Discipline Society the task was not merely to secure public order but to go back to pre-war Howardian basics. Reformers set out to ‘acquire dominion over the mind of the offender’ sufficient to secure a ‘reformation’ of character which, when reinforced by a process of instruction and retraining, would allow the transgressor’s eventual reintegration in society on terms guaranteeing ‘the future peace and happiness of all’.²⁷ For the Mendicity Society the goal was to strip away the impersonality of existing transfers of resources between rich and poor and to reinstate ‘the gift’ as a moralising force in the lives of both givers and receivers. In the case of both associations the ultimate goal was to strengthen ‘that good feeling, which it is so important to maintain amongst all Classes of Society’.²⁸

In both cases, too, the pursuit of these objects put activists in implicit – sometimes explicit – conflict with the values and priorities of the existing social order. This order, as they saw it, rested on an ‘entire want of system’, depended on the discredited expedients of ‘dark’, ‘superstitious’ and ‘barbarous’ past ages, and actually contributed to the degradation of the lower orders by its willingness to allow their corruption by repeated exposure to scenes of physical brutality and moral indelicacy.²⁹

The surfacing of such tensions as these alerts us in turn to distinctive features in the cultural and ideological allegiances of the founders of each association. The Prison Discipline Society, for example, began, in essentials, as an extended network of the metropolitan Quaker *haute bourgeoisie* and its close allies. These included Anglican evangelicals such as T. F. Buxton and his brother-in-law (via the Quaker Gurney family), Samuel Hoare, prominent Dissenters such as the Independent minister and publicist, Josiah Conder, and a Jewish bullion broker

²⁶ *PP* 1816 (396), v.402–3; Society for the Suppression of Mendicity minute book, British Library, Add MS 50136, fos. 1, 4, 46; and see M. Roberts, ‘Reshaping the Gift Relationship. The London Mendicity Society and the Suppression of Begging in England 1818–1869’, *International Review of Social History*, 36 (1991), pp. 202–5, 208–10.

²⁷ *PDS. First Report*, p. 6.

²⁸ *Society for the Suppression of Mendicity* [Mendicity Society]. *Report No. 4* (1822), p. 26.

²⁹ *PDS. First Report* (1818), p. 22; *Sixth Report* (1824), p. 21.

(I. L. Goldsmid), as well as more secular-minded ‘friends of humanity’ (such as the Rousseau-influenced botanist, Russia merchant and antislavery activist, Thomas Furlly Forster). The prime movers, however, as far as the category retains precise meaning in an age ripe for action, were William Allen, his nephew Cornelius Hanbury and the Spitalfields Quaker silk manufacturer, Peter Bedford.³⁰

The ability to stand resolutely against certain cultural assumptions of the age was thus built into the world of most of the founders of the new society and had, indeed, already been tested during the years of wartime. (It was as early as 1808 that the Allen circle had linked forces with the Whig-radical associate of Jeremy Bentham, Basil Montagu, to form an extra-parliamentary support group for Sir Samuel Romilly in his campaign against capital punishment: this was the tiny Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge on the Punishment of Death, and the Improvement of Prison Discipline.³¹)

In the post-war period the combined prison-visiting, relief work and intercessory lobbying of public authorities on behalf of condemned prisoners which the core group continued to practise developed an emotion-charged momentum of its own.³² It became impossible for evangelicals committed to the biblical precept that ‘God desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live’ to turn from their calling. (Emotions were particularly intensified in cases which involved women and children – groups interpreted in the context of their degraded environment as more sinned against by a neglectful society than sinning.³³) As prudent conciliators the new activists took care to keep the lines of deferential communication open between themselves and the holders of public office. This required them deliberately to divide their activities into separate organisational forms: the care of juveniles and the modernisation of prison discipline became the attainable and advertised objective, a non-retributory criminal code a more privately pursued goal for zealots.³⁴ But the social objective in each case was a blended one – to prove that ‘hearts’ could be ‘tender’d’ across class boundaries, that moral reclamation of the outcast could be achieved, and that a system which

³⁰ *Life of William Allen*, i.222, 228.

³¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 33; *An Account of the Origin and Object of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge upon the Punishment of Death, and the Improvement of Prison Discipline* (1812), pp. 7, 12. The *Third Report* of the society (1816) reveals that almost the whole of its committee joined the Juvenile Delinquency Committee and served on the early committees of the PDS. The society was then allowed to lapse until 1828 when it was reconstituted around the original core of members as the Society for the Diffusion of Information on the Subject of Capital Punishments: see its *Prospectus* [1831]; D. Cooper, *The Lesson of the Scaffold* (1974), pp. 55–6.

³² *Life of William Allen*, i.172, 341; K. Fry and R. E. Cresswell (eds.), *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry* (2 vols., 2nd edn, 1848), i.255.

³³ E.g., *PDS. Third Report* (1821), pp. 47–9.

³⁴ *Life of William Allen*, ii.167, 195, and iii.9–11; *PDS. First Report* (1818), pp. 30–1, and *Fourth Report* (1822), pp. 13–14. Cf. V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 371ff.

failed to attempt this moral reconciliation was doomed to contribute to its own downfall:

It is the ordination of Divine Wisdom, that man cannot suffer from the neglect of man without mutual injury; and by a species of moral retribution, society is punished by the omission of its duties to the ignorant and the guilty.³⁵

The ordinations of Divine Wisdom loomed less large in the mental world of the Mendicity Society, though the concern to update the performance of social duties owed by rich and poor to each other remained equally insistent. In the case of the Mendicity Society moralisers relied on the secular science of political economy to evaluate the moral adequacy of existing social dealings.

We noted in the previous chapter how the charity organisers of the years of wartime distress had already begun the task of adjustment of charitable practice to the priorities of a free market in labour: the investigation of the causes of distress and the monitoring of the effects of relief-giving had become a semi-professional skill. Investigators such as Matthew Martin and William Allen thus had an existing stock of ideas and expertise on which to draw by the war's end, as did a range of provincial activists.³⁶ All these evangelically tinged pioneers were eventually to give their support to the new society in London when it was set up in January 1818.³⁷ But they were hardly its moving spirits.

The key activist and first secretary of the London Mendicity Society was in fact a young Islington-born 'auctioneer and house agent' with some experience as a metropolitan overseer of the poor – William Henry Bodkin. Bodkin's allies among the collection of professionals and businessmen who made up the society's board of management included some evangelicals but even more secular radicals, among them the MPs Joseph Hume and David Ricardo.³⁸ The most active non-executive office-holder of the new society was the Liberal Tory MP (and eventual member of the 1832 Poor Law Commission), William Sturges Bourne. These last-mentioned figures certainly had a record of moral concern but of a markedly rationalist bent.³⁹ Sturges Bourne had only recently been frustrated in parliamentary attempts to commit the government to a policy of phasing out altogether the poor law in its existing form and it makes sense to interpret his commitment to the new volunteer cause as very much the exploration of an alternative way forward to the goal of a fully self-regulating labour market.⁴⁰

³⁵ *PDS. Third Report* (1821), p. 63. Cf. Fry and Cresswell, *Elizabeth Fry*, i.201; and see generally, Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, ch. 6, and McGowen, 'A Powerful Sympathy', pp. 312–34.

³⁶ Roberts 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship', pp. 206–7.

³⁷ Mendicity Society minute book, fos. 4, 10.

³⁸ For further occupational analysis, see Roberts, 'Reshaping', pp. 209–11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, and see *Political Economy Club Centenary Volume* (1921), pp. 1–4, 210–13.

⁴⁰ See *Mendicity Society. Report No. 2* (1820), p. 22, for the warning that the society aimed at taking the laws of the country for its guide, 'so far as their enforcement is consistent with

At any rate, the new society spared no opportunity to preach the new gospel that ‘indiscriminate almsgiving is not charity’ – that ‘true benevolence’ required an examination of circumstance to distinguish ‘the deserving’ from ‘the vicious’.⁴¹ In this way the principles of the free market were to be extended from the world of business and of labour discipline into the world of charity: investors in works of charity were to be as entitled to make their decisions on the basis of full information as in any other area of market choice. The involuntary subsidy to waste and injustice would be ended, freeing resources for cases of legitimate need. And, in contrast to the experience of investors in the poor law or endowed forms of charity, investors in monitored forms of charity would be assured of the morally profitable return of a grateful and self-reliant labouring population, so encouraging further investment.⁴²

This was a definite vision of moral relationships modernised, though not in quite the way the religiously motivated could accept without reservation. As, in a previous age, the more scrupulous among evangelicals had hesitated to endorse unconditionally a movement for enforcing social discipline from the paternalist political ‘right’ (the Vice Society), so, in this age, some had similar hesitations about a system of social controls devised by the Radical free market ‘left’. This debate over the permissible aims and methods of true charity will be explored more fully in the final section of this chapter. It suffices at present to note two points. First, the Mendicity Society was not the first secularising initiative to arouse evangelical suspicion of radical enthusiasm for (as they saw it) self-defeating schemes of godless social reclamation. (William Allen, a reluctant recruit to the Mendicity Society, had already, by 1818, spent several years in bruising conflict with Hume, Robert Owen and other Radicals over the place of religious instruction in popular education.⁴³) And, second, this evangelical unease seems to have been widely enough shared to depress the early recruiting fortunes of the new society, thus making its future an uncertain one.

The turn of events needed to put support for the Mendicity Society on a firmer footing was one bringing about a tightened sense of social apprehension. That tightening was not to come about until the crisis years 1819–21 – though, once experienced, it would affect the direction of moral reform activity on more fronts than one. The most dramatic incidents of this brief yet formative period are well

the best principles of political economy’. For Sturges Bourne’s key role in the parliamentary campaign for poor law reform after 1815, see Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 244–8, 289–94; P. Mandler, ‘Tories and Paupers: Christian Political Economy and the Making of the New Poor Law’, *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), pp. 91–3, 98–100; D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 128–32.

⁴¹ Mendicity Society minute book, fos. 4, 47.

⁴² *Mendicity Society. Report No. 4* (1822), p. 26; *Report No. 5* (1823), p. 25.

⁴³ *Life of William Allen*, i.267; A. Prochaska, ‘The Practice of Radicalism: Educational Reform in Westminster’, in J. Stevenson (ed.), *London in the Age of Reform* (Oxford, 1977), p. 112.

known: the climax of radical political mobilisation in provincial England and the Peterloo massacre of August 1819, the ferment of London radical politics and the uncovering of the Cato Street conspiracy in 1820, the regrouping and symbolic victories of metropolitan radicals over a morally vulnerable governing elite in their campaign of support for the wronged Queen Caroline during 1820–1. While this time round political disaffection was rather less linked to economic hardship than it had been in the immediate past, the anxiety that localised distress – even that brought about in the casual labour market by the severe winter of 1819–20 – might give insurrectionists their opening was still difficult to wipe from the mind.

Yet to a significant proportion of educated, middle-class opinion mere executive efficiency and legislative repression were no sure remedies for the fevered state of social relations even if it was agreed (and it was not) that these remedies were a necessary part of treatment.⁴⁴ Political crisis gave a special sense of urgency, even fulfilment, to volunteer builders of social bridges:

It is impossible to recur to these efforts of Philanthropy [during the hard winter of 1819–20], and to recollect the attempts which were at the same time making, to spread disaffection and discontent amongst the lower orders (who had been in too many instances deluded into a belief that the rich were their oppressors) without acknowledging that the wisdom of an unerring Providence was discernible *even in the rigor of the season*, which, by calling forth the most unprecedented exertions for the relief of the poor, effectually recalled them to a knowledge of their real benefactors.⁴⁵

Thus reported the Mendicity Society in 1820. By that stage early tensions between religious and secular activists had receded in the face of more pressing matters of relief-raising and distribution control. The urge to give, but to give prudently, without harassment, now began to provide the Mendicity Society with a reliable recruitment base. By the early 1820s it was attracting the support of some 1,500 annual subscribers, not counting casual donors, and its goals and methods of operation were being taken up across the country. (By 1823 it was claiming links with more than twenty beggar-policing societies spread along the seasonal labour migration routes of provincial England; and in London and resort towns with chronic begging problems the related development of district visiting societies on the Spitalfields model sometimes helped to extend its influence and effectiveness.⁴⁶)

⁴⁴ On reaction to Peterloo cf. J. E. Cookson, *Lord Liverpool's Administration. The Crucial Years, 1815–1822* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 180ff.; Buxton, *Memoirs*, pp. 95–6; J. B. Braithwaite, *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney* (2 vols., 2nd edn, 1855), i.176; R. M. Bacon, *A Memoir of the Life of Edward, Third Baron Suffield* (Norwich, 1838), pp. 85–92.

⁴⁵ *Mendicity Society. Report No. 2* (1820), p. 19.

⁴⁶ For a national list of mid-1820s mendicity societies, see *Report No. 5* (1823), pp. 12–13. Links with the district visiting movement are explored more fully in the final section of this chapter. It should be noted at this point, however, that the incentive to expand the scope of both mendicity

Animals and antislavery: the symbolic politics of the 1820s

If quasi-policing societies such as the Mendicity Society did well out of the years of social tension, associations with an explicit claim to be assisting public authorities did even better. Some of these were little more than thinly disguised political fronts. (The short-lived and much criticised Constitutional Association for the prosecution of seditious libels was the most conspicuous of these.⁴⁷) But others presented their claims in terms of moral defence: among them was a revitalised Vice Society. Indeed, it may be argued that the Vice Society owed its survival as an institution to the opportunity presented by a fear of revived Painite radicalism – that is, fear of a system of ideas which directly linked its critique of political authority with a rejection of the authority of revealed religion. Just as Evangelicals and High Churchmen in the Proclamation Society had moved to protect the perceived foundations of popular morality by prosecuting the publisher of Paine's *Age of Reason* in 1797, so they now moved against Paine's disciple, Richard Carlile.⁴⁸ The results were gratifying. The court battles raged from 1819 to 1823 and as they generated publicity (for the society as well as Carlile), income doubled and redoubled. Between 1819 and 1821 the society gained a select intake of new members and an income of £900–1,500 a year. From this income it retained a surplus sufficient to subsidise not only its 'emergency' work but also its recurrent activities – now, chiefly, the suppression of pornography.⁴⁹ With the 'infidel' scare running on into the Queen Caroline years, this continuing activity also brought the society new favour as supporters of aristocratic society and its institutions moved to modify the image of aristocratic libertinism being projected before an increasingly restive middle-class public.⁵⁰

Not all moral reform causes flourished equally in the crisis years, however. Some found the overcharged atmosphere quite hostile to their interests. Causes with long-term goals of gradual resocialisation by as yet untested means were particularly vulnerable, having either to modify their methods and arguments or else to face a loss of interest and public tolerance.

and visiting societies in England continued to be limited by the existence of the ratepayer-funded poor law. This helped to block the spread across the border of the otherwise highly influential Scots model of combined civil and religious 'police' under parish control as developed in Glasgow, c. 1819, by the Revd Thomas Chalmers: Poynter, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 234–7. Cf. Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, p. 56.

⁴⁷ *Constitutional Association for Opposing the Progress of Disloyal and Seditious Principles. Address* (1821); W. H. Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press* (1928), pp. 181–203. The list of c. 700 subscribers to this association includes a significant number of Vice Society leaders (e.g. Hoare, Teignmouth), though others are equally significantly absent (e.g. Wilberforce, Lord Kenyon).

⁴⁸ Wilberforce, *Life*, v.38–40; Wickwar, *The Struggle*, pp. 70–1, 82ff.; R. Hole, *Pulpits. Politics and Public Order in England 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1989), ch. 14.

⁴⁹ *Society for the Suppression of Vice [Report]* (1825), pp. 13–21.

⁵⁰ For the origins of the Eton College standing-order subscription to the Vice Society, see *Christian Observer*, 22 (1822), p. 185.

Prison reform was the cause most visibly affected by the withdrawal of the benefit of public doubt: the result was that evangelical attempts to touch conscience inevitably gave way before considerably more impersonal and retributive ‘technologies’ of habit-breaking deterrence.⁵¹ There were even signs behind the scenes of once-optimistic reformers coming close to breaking point on the question whether efforts spent teaching the masses to read had proved counter-productive.⁵² These doubts were quickly to be rationalised into plans for more systematic intervention. Promoters of literacy as a vehicle of religious and moral enlightenment were, nevertheless, on the defensive throughout the crisis period. This fact helps to explain some of the otherwise apparently schizophrenic multiple volunteer priorities of these years, especially the combination of a repressive strategy for dealing with press blasphemy, licentiousness and sedition with a counter-attractive strategy for weaning readers onto a more wholesome literary diet.⁵³

Yet, in the medium term, the crisis years acted not so much to dampen or discredit programmes of moral modernisation as to convince their sponsors of the need to extend their range and deepen their social penetration. Even as political tensions eased, new ways of building social bridges sprang to mind. In November 1822, the Revd Arthur Broome made his first attempt, in London, to form an association for the protection of animals. Slightly earlier still that autumn, Zachary Macaulay, Wilberforce, Stephen Lushington and Lord Suffield had met with Fowell Buxton at Buxton’s Norfolk retreat in order to calculate how best to harness newly emerging sentiment for the abolition of West Indies slavery.⁵⁴ The formal associations which eventually emerged from these tentative beginnings were to become the most enterprising mobilisers of the moral reform energies of the following decade – the London Society for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery from 1823 onwards, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals from 1824. It has sometimes been suggested that these new societies represented displacements rather than extensions of previous moral reform enthusiasms – attempts to find safely apolitical causes to patronise – but contemporary evidence suggests otherwise.

⁵¹ PDS income dropped from £2,608 over 18 months in 1820–1 to £893 in 1821–2 (12 months) before picking up again. Subscriber membership hovered between 330 and 500 over the same period.

⁵² E.g., Wilberforce, *Life*, v.487; Bacon, *Suffield*, p. 97.

⁵³ Note especially the efforts at this time of key Vice Society veterans such as Wilberforce, Zachary Macaulay and Lords Teignmouth and Kenyon to extend the work of volunteer ‘moral antidote’ associations such as the Bible and the Religious Tract Societies, and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge: 2nd Baron Teignmouth, *Memoir of the Life and Correspondence of John [1st] Lord Teignmouth*, ii.358–60; *Evangelical Magazine*, 28 (1820), pp. 297–8; *SPCK. Report for 1819* (1820), appendix III, pp. 170–83.

⁵⁴ J. Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast. Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore, 1980), p. 40; Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 130.

A first problem with any ‘displacement’ argument is to reconcile it with the open way in which leaders of the new societies advertised their pleasure at the strength of their links with continuing supporters of older-established moral reform causes. A further problem concerns the way in which such an argument would seem to discount the explicit assertions of these leaders that they hoped as much to reclaim citizens of the home society as to relieve the suffering of animals and the oppression of slaves. The overarching project was still (as it always had been) to build a society founded on common moral values strong enough to bridge the rifts of class and culture. Thus Fowell Buxton, presiding at the inaugural public meeting of the SPCA, having noted the presence of ‘many persons distinguished for their active benevolence’ and for their contribution to changing ‘the moral feeling throughout the land’ by their support for the British and Foreign School Society, the Prison Discipline Society and like associations, went on to emphasise the scope of the challenge now taken up:

[I]t was desirable, not only to prevent the exercise of cruelty towards animals, but to spread amongst the lower orders of the people, especially amongst those to whom the care of animals was intrusted, a degree of moral feeling which would compel them to think and act like those of a superior class, instead of sinking into a comparison (in which their inferiority was now unfortunately acknowledged) with the poor brute over which they exercised a brutal authority.⁵⁵

The Anti-Slavery Society was even more earnest in presenting its cause as a symbolic test of ability to relate sympathetically across barriers of culture and circumstance.⁵⁶ (Buxton was, as noted, a prominent founding member of that society as well.)

Of the two new associations it was the Anti-Slavery Society which started off most confident of its ability to spread its moral message to the national audience of potential converts. This confidence rested largely on the memory of past success. Many members of the new society had participated in the campaign against the slave trade (see chapter 1). This earlier campaign, they recalled, had been led by religious elites yet supported by secular libertarians; it had also shown itself capable of arousing a mass urban provincial following whenever the leaders had thought it tactically prudent to encourage it.⁵⁷ Between the early 1790s and the early 1820s it had not been thought prudent (a brief period

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 17 June 1824, p. 3a; and see H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate* (1987), pp. 130–5. Cf. Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, pp. 33, 37, 53–7.

⁵⁶ Drescher, *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*, pp. 163–4; Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 209–10; Colley, *Britons*, pp. 350–60.

⁵⁷ D. Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780–1860* (1991), pp. 3–5, 47ff. Cf. Drescher, *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*, pp. 69ff., who argues for the existence from the 1780s of a more ‘popular’, less elite-mobilised, antislavery movement than Turley (or I) accept to have been the case.

towards the end of the war excepted) to encourage it. (The abolition of the slave trade in 1807, while it had given ‘symbolic satisfaction’ to supporters, had, in tactical terms, been a triumph of ‘insider’ negotiation with government.⁵⁸) Now, with a more settled international and domestic climate established, came the realisation that slave-dependent colonies denied replenishment had failed to develop ‘naturally’ towards emancipation as hoped. This, combined with the realisation among the first generation of evangelical veterans that their remaining time in public life was likely to be short, led to the refiring of a sense of spiritual urgency – a sense of urgency sufficient to drive the ageing leaders of the slave trade abolition cause to make one last effort to save the nation from association with moral infamy and the slaves from spiritual extinction.⁵⁹ By this point, however, key representatives of a new generation of supporters were also playing their part in keeping the veterans up to the mark. Within antislavery circles the most sensitive to the scandal of moral injustice were the Quakers, most notably Quaker women. (The impression made in 1821 by the dying Priscilla Gurney on her brother-in-law, Fowell Buxton, to remember ‘the poor, dear slaves!’ gives some idea of the emotional intensity the issue was capable of generating by then.⁶⁰) On the fringes of the movement the lay leaders of provincial evangelicalism were also emerging at last from the ‘frozen decades’ of local political polarisation which kept them subdued throughout the years of international and domestic emergency. For this reason it was clear to the London-based old guard (Wilberforce, Macaulay, William Allen) that, by 1822, a movement was theirs for the asking.⁶¹ It would not necessarily be theirs to control, however.

When the Anti-Slavery Society was launched in January 1823, it duly registered this balance of forces. A ceremonial nucleus of Wilberforce-era veterans welcomed an energetic new generation of metropolitan and provincial recruits. Evangelicals, especially Quaker evangelicals, totally dominated the first committee.⁶² The determination of this committee to adopt the outlook of a countrywide pressure group rather than a London-based lobbying elite was clear from the first, with hints of even more innovative methods of mobilisation to come.⁶³ Once having accepted the advice of its leading provincial organiser,

⁵⁸ R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (1988), pp. 299–315, esp. 313–15; Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, p. 63.

⁵⁹ Wilberforce, *Life*, v.129, 158–9, 170; *Life of William Allen*, iii.230, 383; Buxton, *Memoirs*, 125–7; Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 31–2.

⁶⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 129. See also *Life of Allen*, iii.212, 326.

⁶¹ D. B. Davis, ‘James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1821–1823’, *Journal of Negro History*, 45 (1960), pp. 249ff.

⁶² British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society minute books, 20 May 1823, Rhodes House, Oxford (Bodl.), MSS Brit. Emp. s.20 E2/1, fos. 27–8; *Life of William Allen*, ii.326; H. Temperley, ‘Anti-Slavery’, in Hollis, *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England*, p. 33.

⁶³ Anti-Slavery Society minute books E2/1, fos. 17, 19, 21.

the Liverpool Quaker merchant James Cropper, that it send out agents to make contact with 'names which we may obtain from – the Bible Society – The Church Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodists' across the country, it found itself at the head of a network of 220 branches within sixteen months of foundation.⁶⁴ At Westminster, by the mid-1820s, its reputation was as yet far from secure. (Its 1824 sponsorship of a Commons resolution declaring the 'principle' of slavery incompatible with English law or with Christianity was widely believed by MPs to have triggered a West Indies slave revolt.) In the country at large, however, it was already a movement securely anchored in public view.⁶⁵

This confident sense of destiny systematically fulfilled was not an experience shared by the founders of the SPCA. It was true (though not necessarily helpful to advertise the fact) that the SPCA also had an organisational pedigree of sorts – back to the Vice Society.⁶⁶ The cause could also count on a useful amount of official support for that part of its work directed at the curbing of popular 'animal amusements': it was no doubt a residue of post-war concern about the effectiveness of urban policing which helped to create a parliamentary majority for the first specific anti-cruelty measure of the age – Richard Martin's Act of 1822 to 'prevent cruel and improper treatment of cattle' on their way to urban markets for slaughter.⁶⁷ (Martin's otherwise notorious reputation as a violent and eccentric Irish backwoodsman can hardly have done the trick on its own.)

Yet the founders of the SPCA regarded themselves from the start as pioneers of a new standard of moral sensibility, not as mere auxiliaries to authorities searching for solutions to problems of public order: '[P]enal enactments have necessarily but a limited and imperfect operation; and much remains to be done [to realise] the great moral and Christian obligation of kindness and compassion towards the brute creation . . . for [which] purpose the present Society has been established.'⁶⁸ The problem was that, while this campaign to create a common standard of human sensitivity before animal (and, by implication, human) suffering had (like the cause of the slaves) an appeal to evangelical-romantic and secular-enlightened elites alike, it was as yet at the top of nobody's

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fos. 34–5, 9 June 1823; *Anti-Slavery Society. Report for 1823* (1824), p. 37.

⁶⁵ For raw statistics of growth, see *Anti-Slavery Society. Accounts with a List of the Subscribers for the Years 1823–1831* (1832). Annual subscriber income (from c. 260–300 names) peaks at £2,848 in 1824 but slumps to £910 by 1828 before reviving to £2,127 in 1831.

⁶⁶ There were two paid-up members of the Vice Society on the foundation committees of the SPCA (Wilberforce, Sir James Graham). The first single-purpose 'society for the Suppression and Prevention of Wanton Cruelty to Animals' had begun in Liverpool in 1809, but had failed to establish itself: A. W. Moss, *Valiant Crusade. The History of the RSPCA* (1961), pp. 20–1.

⁶⁷ Note the simultaneous peaking of a campaign by magistrates, property-owners and individual moral reformers against metropolitan fairs: *Life of William Allen*, ii.225; H. Cunningham, 'The Metropolitan Fairs', in A. J. Donajrodzki (ed.), *Social Control in 19th Century Britain* (1977), pp. 164–7.

⁶⁸ 'Prospectus of the SPCA' (1825), Horsham, Sussex, RSPCA Records, ii.201 (typescript).

list of moral reform priorities. As we know, it was later to become one of the most popular and resilient of all nineteenth-century ‘charities’: its early years were precarious even by the standards of late Hanoverian voluntarism.

The problem was not a lack of credible sponsors. (Buxton and Wilberforce, Sir James Mackintosh and the Benthamite law reformer, Basil Montagu, all joined its first committees.) But the core of enthusiasts who did the bulk of the society’s work were not well enough placed socially or financially to convince potential supporters of the comparative worth of their approach to the problem of cultural reclamation. The key member of the founding committee – the Revd Arthur Broome – was in fact imprisoned in 1826 for debts incurred on the society’s behalf, while his richer and more entrepreneurial successor, Lewis Gompertz (secretary 1826–32), was an outsider to the point of eccentricity even in moral reform circles.⁶⁹ Other members of the foundation committee hardly strengthened the society’s position – a handful of ‘independent’ MPs, a scattering of (usually sleeping partner) City merchants, and a large proportion of lower-rank professionals employed in medicine, law, publishing, journalism and the more precarious reaches of the Church of England as (often) unbeneficed clergy.⁷⁰ In contrast to the cause of the slaves, the cause of ‘the brute creation’ found no ready networks of existing organisation on which to graft its activities. It was not until after 1832, as we shall see, that the SPCA started to attract significant financial support or to show a capacity to put down roots beyond metropolitan London.⁷¹ And by that stage a new high wave of cultural anxiety had swept across the country to usher in, as many believed, the end of the old order in England.

Morals, markets and Protestantism, 1828–1834

The years 1828–32 are bound to loom large in any political or constitutional history of England. It is not so often stressed how the political and economic events of these years combined to produce a form of ‘cultural fall-out’. Yet this was certainly the case. As a modern observer traces the reactions of the morally sensitive to the events of the reform period, the most revealing comparison seems as often to be with the culturally unsettled 1780s as with the era of open disorder which followed 1815. ‘Storms seem gathering in every direction, and the tempest may soon break upon my own house. Assist me, then, O Lord’,

⁶⁹ RSPCA minute books, vol. i, fos. 37, 40, 56, RSPCA, Horsham, Sussex; Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, pp. 40–2.

⁷⁰ For the membership of committees appointed at the SPCA inaugural meeting, 16 June 1824, see minute books, vol. i, fos. 2–3.

⁷¹ SPCA subscriber income was £252 in 1827–8 (the first year for which figures are available) and hovered around this figure until the mid-1830s when it started to rise rapidly: minute books, vol. i, fo. 67; *Annual Report*, no. 6 (1832), etc. Total membership in 1831–2 was still fewer than 200: *Annual Report* (1832), p. 26.

wrote Fowell Buxton in the midst of the Reform bill crisis.⁷² Part of this sense of alarm had undoubtedly been generated by Buxton's recent brushes with the 'Captain Swing' movement of agricultural revolt. (The spread of social insubordination from town to countryside gave added reason for anxiety to those, like Buxton, already all too aware of depression-swollen crime statistics and the spread of industrial unionism in English towns.⁷³) But the 'storms' Buxton saw gathering were also crises of cultural adjustment – crises triggered by the interacting forces of religion and politics, and of politics, commerce and technology.

The first of these crises to make its impact on the world of moral reformers was the crisis which followed the granting of equal political rights to Catholics in 1829. Catholic Emancipation was bound to have a profound effect on the way in which many Protestant evangelicals viewed their priorities. Was this, perhaps, a sign of the onset of a final confrontation between the forces of light and of darkness? Those already attracted to the premillennial vision of a world on the brink of experiencing a second coming of Christ became very much more intent on purging their actions of secular expediency, while even those sceptical of an imminent visitation came closer to a belief that the times were likely to see the taking of decisive steps either towards or away from a godly society.⁷⁴ Calls for Christians to be true to their beliefs, whatever the social cost, had their most unsettling effect on the Bible Society and the antislavery movement, but few associations with substantial evangelical support bases escaped the mood. By its 1832 annual meeting even the SPCA was debating the precise relation of its work to theological first principles: demands from subscribers that the society operate 'exclusively on Christian principles' helped to dislodge its Jewish secretary (Gompertz) from office shortly afterwards.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, old-fashioned Protestant High Churchmen – those who found 'free trade in religion' almost as distressing in its Dissenting Protestant as in its Catholic form – acted to harness the mood to their own purposes. (Lord Kenyon, most 'ultra' of all last-ditch opponents of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, managed in 1831 to win a reprieve for the Vice Society's 'Churchmen only' membership rule in spite of increasing pressure to move with the times.⁷⁶)

As to free trade in more material commodities, that too gave new reasons for unease. Moves towards free trade in labour which had already stirred moral controversy in the early 1820s returned to the public agenda in the early 1830s,

⁷² Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 283. Cf. ch. 1, n. 96 (Wilberforce in 1785). See also Braithwaite, *Gurney*, i.405–6.

⁷³ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp. 286–9, 386–7; Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 179ff.

⁷⁴ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989), pp. 81–94; Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 10–11, 211ff.; D. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (1984), pp. 24–34.

⁷⁵ SPCA, *Annual Report*, no. 6 (1832), p. 58.

⁷⁶ Diary of George, 2nd Lord Kenyon, 9 June 1831, Kenyon papers, Gredington, Shropshire.

this time complemented by plans to free production and distribution systems as well. For Fowell Buxton the moment to reconcile principle with practice came in 1830 with the passing of the Beer Act. The Beer Act was justified by its government sponsors as a monopoly-curbing measure but it also struck in passing at the profit margins of established brewers such as Buxton himself and at the role of magistrates as censors of public morals. (The new beershops, unlike existing alehouses, needed no magistrate's licence.) Buxton duly gave way to the logic of a market-based system of self-policing morality, not without qualms.⁷⁷

Others less trusting of commercial freedoms than Buxton found the promotion of old evils in new forms just impossible to accept, and especially when their impact was spread across the country by modern technology. A leading case in point here is, of course, reaction to that novelty of the age, the steam train. While passenger services between Manchester and Liverpool began in 1830 amid scenes of general enthusiasm and amazement, the realisation that 'the piety of man does not keep pace with his ingenuity' came not long after. Within two years of the coming of passenger services a Commons committee on Sunday observance was hearing evidence from respectable citizens that Sabbath profanation in Liverpool had risen steeply as a result of this new leisure opportunity; and already groups were forming to protect culture against the social consequences of commercial and technological change.⁷⁸

From this sketch it may easily be deduced that the final two aspects of vice to be chipped away from the organisationally undifferentiated block of early-century moral concerns were Sabbath profanation and intemperance.⁷⁹ In a broad sense these were moral concerns which had never entirely disappeared from view since their listing in the 1787 royal proclamation. There were good reasons, all the same, why they should have been rediscovered and made objects of specialist attention at the end of the 1820s.

In the case of temperance, anxieties already present in middle-class minds about working-class drinking habits were further focused by a cluster of events suggesting a change in patterns of alcohol consumption. The unreflective use of raw official statistics which had so confused debate on law and order issues also had its impact on the formation of middle-class temperance opinion. Particular alarm followed Peel's attempt in 1825 to drive tax-evading suppliers out of the market by lowering the excise on spirits. This had the unintended side-effect of

⁷⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 245. Cf. Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 75–6, 83. Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 69–70.

⁷⁸ HC SC on Sabbath Observance, *PP* 1831–2 (697), vii.92 (Q. 1339). For the view that 'the piety of man does not keep pace with his ingenuity', see *Lord's Day Observance Society* [LDOS], *Report No. 5* (1836), p. 18. But cf. Joseph Livesey's contrary view (*Moral Reformer*, 1 (1831), p. 133) that the 'moral effects' of the railways seemed to include 'order, quietness, and good behaviour' of a sort shaming to the drink-trade-connected coach routes.

⁷⁹ For Vice Society withdrawal from its Sabbath-defending role in implicit favour of the newly established LDOS, see *Christian Observer*, 31 (1831), p. 241.

producing statistics which for the first time measured something approaching real levels of consumption. The further opening of the trade to competition through the passing of the 1830 Beer Act also had its effect in raising educated public awareness of alcohol consumption, as did the concurrent investment of spirit retailers in a glamorous venue for product marketing – the gin palace. None of this activity seems to have altered trends in per capita consumption overall. (The immediate aftermath of the Beer Act excepted, consumption was probably slowly falling from a peak.⁸⁰) But it often looked as if consumption had risen.⁸¹

So it was that, when poor rate spending and police statistics began to rise in the depressed years of the later 1820s, urban professional and administrative elites thought they knew one place at least where an effort might be made to strengthen working-class moral character. As in the 1780s, the pioneer efforts of volunteer association were made in the provincial industrial areas of the north. (Bradford has the claim to be first in England, though its founder relied in fact on Glasgow precedent.⁸²) In contrast to the 1780s, however, enthusiasm for the movement spread considerably beyond county quarter sessions and borough corporations.⁸³ (A significant part of chapter 4 to follow will chart how, by the mid-1830s, temperance had in fact become a major channel for the expression of working-class cultural self-assertion.) Nonetheless, the leadership networks of temperance – more precisely anti-spirits – associations as they began to emerge in the early 1830s were networks not yet significantly different in social tone or assumptions from the antislavery, prison discipline circle already investigated. When in 1831 an effort was made to co-ordinate the movement into a national framework by the formation of a London-based British and Foreign Temperance Society (BFTS) this new society recruited so easily from existing philanthropic elites that its later troubles when faced with the problem of trying to adapt to the demands of provincial teetotal ‘moral extremists’ become all too easy to predict.⁸⁴ For the first phase of operations, however, such links gave a guarantee both of resources and of policy moderation.⁸⁵

The Sunday observance movement could hardly match this array of respectability and resources. Its stated objects were usually formulated in a way

⁸⁰ Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 64–9.

⁸¹ E.g., *British and Foreign Temperance Society* [BFTS]. *Report No. 1* (1832), pp. 55–6, 81–2.

⁸² Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 99–101.

⁸³ At its widest spread of organisation in 1835 the BFTS claimed to be ‘in connexion’ with 557 local temperance societies, total membership 115,782: *Report No. 4* (1835), pp. 13, 103–8.

⁸⁴ For BFTS founding committee, see *Report No. 1* (1832), pp. 3–4. The first treasurer was Cornelius Hanbury, William Allen’s son-in-law. Other members linked the BFTS with the committees of the Anti-Slavery Society and its Agency Committee offshoot, the Prison Discipline Society, the Mendicity Society, the SPCA and LDOS.

⁸⁵ BFTS subscription and donation income began at £1,021 in 1831–2 and peaked at £1,793 in 1833–4.

which made them seem, when compared with the goals of the temperance movement, to be exercises in cultural nostalgia as well. Yet the reasons given by Sunday observance activists for reviving the cause in the later 1820s were notably similar. This was particularly evident from the way in which both groups managed to link fears about social stability with anxieties about the spread of modern commercial temptation.⁸⁶ In urban areas anxiety was most often expressed by attacks on Sunday trading (the drink trade, cattle markets, mass entertainments and the scandal-mongering Sunday press most of all).⁸⁷ In rural and provincial communities Sunday observance was usually a movement of cultural environment protection led by clergy in an effort to prevent commercial promoters of Sunday travel from flooding the district with urban pleasure-seekers.⁸⁸ In both cases the complaint was made that the profanation of the Sabbath led to disorder, intemperance, crime and habitual disrespect for authority. Above all, it was a standing insult to the Almighty. As the key resolution at the first annual meeting of the Lord's Day Observance Society phrased it: '[T]he general profanation of the Lord's Day, throughout this Christian and Protestant land, is a great national evil. [S]uch open violation of an express commandment of Almighty God may well be expected to bring down his Judgments upon the nation; and . . . has strong and direct tendency to demoralise the people.'⁸⁹ It may be seen from the 'Christian and Protestant' label that the movement attracted Churchmen and Dissenters alike. In London it was in fact the Dissenter-dominated Christian Instruction Society (a district visiting group) which took the lead in attempts to shame parish officials into action.⁹⁰ Dissenters, however, still remained in two minds about the wisdom of encouraging state regulation of religious observance. This, combined with the near-monopoly advantage enjoyed by Churchmen in local government, ensured that the Lord's Day Observance Society (LDOS), when it was founded in January 1831, restricted invitations to join its committee to Churchmen alone.⁹¹ The individual Churchmen who

⁸⁶ *LDOS. Report No. 1* (1832), p. 18. Cf. *BFTS. Report No. 2* (1833), p. 22.

⁸⁷ *Christian Instruction Society. A Statement on the Awful Profanation of the Lord's Day*, pp. 1–5; HC SC on Sabbath Observance, *PP* 1831–32 (697), vii.77 (QQ. 1112–13); *LDOS. Report No. 1* (1832), pp. 18–19.

⁸⁸ *LDOS. Report No. 1*, p. 28; G. M. Ellis, 'The Evangelicals and the Sunday Question, 1830–1860' (Harvard Ph.D., 1951), pp. 63–70.

⁸⁹ *LDOS. Report No. 1* (1832), p. xii.

⁹⁰ Ellis, 'Evangelicals and the Sunday Question', pp. 54–63. D. M. Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness. The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London 1828–1860* (Westport CT, 1986), p. 38.

⁹¹ Unlike the Vice Society, the LDOS applied its Churchmanship rule only to committee recruits, and by informal rather than by publicly advertised means. It seems plain, nonetheless, that the organisational preconditions for exclusivity were already in place by 1828 when Evangelical advocates of a reinvigorated parish-based Anglicanism set up a metropolitan District Visiting Society to reclaim 'client market share' from the Dissenter-dominated Christian Instruction Society mentioned above. At least five DVS founders became active in the LDOS: Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, p. 38; *Record*, 20 Nov. 1828, p. 1. For short-lived Dissenter volunteer ripostes to the LDOS in the early 1830s, see Ellis, 'Evangelicals and the Sunday Question', pp. 104–5.

took the lead in the new society were very much the disciples of the Revd Daniel Wilson, the Evangelicals' model urban parish clergyman of the 1820s. The decision to found the society was taken at the Clapham house of Wilson's retired silk-merchant cousin, Joseph Wilson, by a group of lawyers, businessmen and parish clergy in association with a banker, a metropolitan magistrate, a young Whig baronet and an Orange-Protestant Tory backbench MP.⁹² While never able to raise funds on a level comparable with mainstream moral reform associations of the 1820s and the 1830s, the LDOS had no trouble recruiting a faithful membership in the years following 1831 and in exploiting to its advantage the continuing provocations which evangelical public opinion encountered.⁹³

In this way the organisational unpacking of the post-war moral reform agenda was completed. It had been a tangled process. Functional definition of objectives had often cut across existing patterns of religious and intellectual loyalty. Political and economic contingencies had thrown the agenda itself into repeated confusion. But the order of events, once placed in context, has its own logic – a logic based both on moving from suppression of symptom to treatment of cause (as moral reformers perceived it), and on discovery of the interrelatedness of the 'problems' which contact with urban popular culture brought to the fore. And the network of co-ordinating individuals, whose commitments collectively sewed together most sections of the moral reform world, stands as tangible confirmation of this sense of progress gained through experience shared. It is the world of shared experience of this elite which needs now to be sketched out more fully.

Evangelicalism unleashed: moral reform leaders after 1815

By the year 1824, as we have now seen, the bulk of moral reform specialisation of the post-war period had already taken place – only just so in certain cases. If we pause to take a 'snapshot' of the office-holding elites at the start of that year we find various patterns of interconnection revealed. At the centre of the 'moral reform web' sit the committee members of those key evangelical/secular

⁹² LDOS Minute Books, 25 Jan. 1831, LDOS, London SE20; J. Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 42–3. For Joseph Wilson, Spitalfields silk merchant, patron of infant education and LDOS secretary (1831–55), see *Record*, 23 July 1855, p. 3; P. McCann, *Popular Education and Socialization in the 19th Century* (1977), pp. 6, 22.

⁹³ LDOS annual reports reveal subscriber and donation income starting at £255 in 1831 before moving up to £4–500 p.a. for most years of the first decade. Subscribers to the central society in London totalled 66 in 1831–2, rising to 223 (20 per cent of them clergy) in 1835–6. By 1840 a national network of auxiliaries covered thirty-five English counties (and beyond) in a highly clergy-dependent way. The new railway towns of Bath, York and Derby had the strongest grass-roots support, Derby claiming 3,000 'enrolled members' shortly after its 1833 foundation: *Report No. 4* (1835), pp. 14–15. The key pioneering role played by two parish societies which predated the LDOS – Stratton (Hants.) and Islington – is set out in Ellis, 'Evangelicals and the Sunday Question', pp. 63–5.

radical joint ventures – the Prison Discipline and Anti-Slavery societies. (Ten of their committee members serve both organisations, accounting for a third of the executive membership of the first, a quarter of the second.) Out on connecting spokes of activity work members who commute to this centre, and to other spokes, from the committees of the Mendicity Society, the Vice Society and the SPCA.⁹⁴ To these spokes will be added, in the early 1830s, commuting paths for executive members of the LDOS and the metropolitan temperance movement. Meanwhile, from the adjacent well-established webs of educational voluntary association, further threads mark out yet more links in the network: these, too, are soon to be extended to include Henry Brougham's 'march of mind' society (the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, founded in 1825).⁹⁵

All these organisations had their headquarters in London. London voluntarism was, of course, uniquely elaborate in structure. London societies generally had more money and more expertise on which to draw than others did. In provincial centres, structures were always more fragile, more likely to stretch across more than one task or even to 'regress' to a catch-all form.⁹⁶ Londoners, when they came across such instances, were usually inclined to interpret them as a sign of backwardness, yet they could hardly fault provincial activists on grounds of principle. Provincials, it might even be argued, helped to keep alive that total vision of moral reform as a campaign of community rebuilding – a campaign in which specialisation was a means, not an end.

Because this was the case, leaders in moral reform continued to appear from a variety of occupational backgrounds with a variety of motives for commitment to match. The ascendancy of urban 'men of business' continues to register strongly: we have already glimpsed this in the lists of the founding fathers of the chief post-war societies. The brokers, bankers, businessmen, rentiers and assorted professionals who appear in these lists all had both means and a sense of cultural provocation sufficient to push them into action. As in the 1780s, a substantial contribution was made by MPs, magistrates and parish officials eager to encourage citizen self-help. As in the 1780s, as well, others were employers of labour – men in search (among other things) of more efficient ways of disciplining their workforce. An even greater proportion than in the 1780s were activists with no direct disciplinary contact with the labouring classes at all (their own servants excepted). In this respect they were registering

⁹⁴ Committee lists from *PDS. Sixth Report of the Committee* (1824); *Anti-Slavery Society. Report for 1823* (1824); *Mendicity Society. Report No. 6* (1824); SPCA minute books, vol. i, fos. 2–3 (16 June 1824); *Society for the Suppression of Vice. [Report]* (1825).

⁹⁵ *LDOS. First Report* (1832); *BFTS. First Report* (1832); *Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. [Prospectus]* (1825?).

⁹⁶ The Liverpool SPCA, for example, claimed its 'legitimate objects' to include not only action against animal cruelty but any activity calculated to remedy that 'want of moral and intellectual cultivation [which] was the cause of this as of every other species of immorality': *Liverpool SPCA. Report* (Liverpool, 1834), p. 3.

the effects of forty years of economic growth and the expansion of middle-class occupations which had accompanied it.⁹⁷

Yet not every employer, magistrate, businessman or clergyman became a campaigner for moral reform, let alone a founder of a voluntary society. Who, then, led the way? For the post-war period it sometimes seems that this question can be reduced to a discussion of the activities of two overlapping circles of notables – that of the Spitalfields philanthropists of East London and the extended family of the banker Gurneys of Earlham. This will not quite do in practice: the full story will require us to consider moral reform ‘growth points’, especially in the midlands and the north-west, which owed little to their connection with this metropolitan–East Anglian elite. There is no doubt, however, that this double inner circle gave continuity, financial stability and a sense of access to the world of national politics and policy formation which no other groups could match.

The Spitalfields circle we have already identified, from the moment when, in 1812, the Quaker pharmaceuticals merchant William Allen joined the Anglican brewer Thomas Fowell Buxton to begin the domestic visitation phase of metropolitan charity relief. Allen had been the experienced senior partner in that venture, and continued to contribute time, funds and ideas to many of the experimental associations which followed.⁹⁸ But it was Buxton who, more than any other individual, embodied the mood and direction of post-war moral reform.

Buxton (1786–1845) was, on some counts, an anomalous figure. His wild, undisciplined rural youth (though perhaps exaggerated for the sake of later contrast), his gradual and delayed conversion to a sense of evangelical dependence on God’s grace for the remission of sins, his life-long addiction to gentlemanly field sports (shooting in particular) – all these facets of character set him apart from the urban domestic model of evangelicalism which was becoming established as ‘normal’ by his generation.⁹⁹ In other respects, however, he qualified well to link past with present. His range of occupational experiences – as

⁹⁷ On the expansion of middle-class occupations see Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 240–71. Cf. Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 115ff.

⁹⁸ For Allen’s role as foundation member of the Juvenile Delinquency Committee, the Mendicity Society, the Anti-Slavery Society and the SDUK, see *Life of Allen*, i.228, 342; ii.326, 429–30. For his retirement from active metropolitan life to rural retreat, see *ibid.*, ii.359–60, 402–3, iii.181ff. The move was clearly accelerated by the death of his only daughter in childbirth (1823) (pp. 349–51); his widowed son-in-law, Cornelius Hanbury, steadily relieved him of business responsibilities and he resigned his chemistry lectureship at Guy’s Hospital in 1826. He died at his model agricultural community, Lindfield (Sussex), in 1843.

⁹⁹ ‘Odd that we should suit so well, having hardly one quality in common’ (Buxton on his relationship with Wilberforce, 22 March 1823): Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 135. See also pp. 3–4 (boyhood wildness), 44–8 (conversion), 170, 206–7 (addiction to field sports). Cf. the evolving ideals of domesticated masculinity documented in Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 108–13; Rosman, *Evangelicals*, pp. 63, 72–4, 97ff.

(successively) businessman, philanthropist, MP and country gentleman – fitted him well for the public life of his period. His business experience, admittedly, he had not planned to acquire: it was brought on by the early death of his father, an Essex landowner, and by the family financial misfortunes which followed. The eight years he spent (1811–18) in consequence, as full-time managing partner at his maternal (Hanbury) uncle's Spitalfields brewery, Buxton privately looked on as a form of intellectual and social exile. As he wrote to a friend in 1817: 'To be happy I must be employed, and on a useful object, for between ourselves (but this is a profound secret) I am sick of having my heart in my vats.'¹⁰⁰ In longer perspective, however, this time was not wasted. The experience gave him the confidence in his ability to transact business, as well as the money he needed to climb back on the stage of public life and service which his family inheritance suggested was his natural level of expectation. It also gave him the chance to build up networks of friendship and trust among evangelically inclined middle-class commercial leaders on whom he might later rely once in politics. And, as we have glimpsed, it gave him a strong incentive in the meantime to seek in works of charity emotional compensation for social prospects thwarted in other directions.

What Buxton saw in Spitalfields – and what he made of that experience – proved to be a crucial step on the road to public recognition. Briefly speaking, what he diagnosed was a case not just of lower-rank rebelliousness but of upper-rank 'neglect', even wilful barbarisation. The lower orders had to be reassured that the privileged actually cared for them. Once they were so assured the way would be cleared for the development of a modernised, less confrontational style of social order. This was a vision with growing appeal, not just among urban commercial elites but among the more shell-shocked members of the landed ranks as well, and by 1818 Buxton's supporters had found him a seat in parliament. He regarded himself as a new breed of public figure: his election, he claimed, proved that 'the time is arrived in which public attention will be diverted from mere contests for power to those higher and more important considerations which affect the welfare and the morality of the lower orders'.¹⁰¹

Once in the Commons, Buxton's vision of redemption by public usefulness for men of his class led him first to campaign on behalf of criminal law and prison reform.¹⁰² Then, as his ability to act as 'linkman' between old and new cultures further revealed itself, his leadership was sought for other causes – slavery and animal protection among them. By 1825, on Wilberforce's retirement from the

¹⁰⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 76, and cf. p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Buxton to Sir G. Sinclair, 12 Nov. 1818, Thomas Fowell Buxton papers, vol. iii, fo. 6, Rhodes House, Oxford. Cf. Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 163–6; McGowen, 'A Powerful Sympathy', pp. 319–23.

¹⁰² Buxton, *Memoirs*, pp. 66, 78–9, 82–90; Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, p. 169.

Commons, it was Buxton who emerged, now fully groomed, to become the great man's 'legislative executor'. And it was in that role that he triumphed in 1833 when he led the cause of slavery abolition through to final (qualified) parliamentary victory.¹⁰³

As significant, though, as Buxton's credentials with a past generation were his links with an increasingly committed set of close colleagues from his own generation, a remarkable number of them relations by blood or marriage. Of these relations none were more valuable to him than the sisters and brothers of his wife, Hannah Gurney. While William Allen had led Buxton into district visiting, it was a sister-in-law, Elizabeth Fry, and a second sister-in-law's husband, Samuel Hoare, who introduced him to that other site of moral neglect – London's prisons.¹⁰⁴ The young brother of the family – Joseph John Gurney, master of Earlham and head of the Norwich-based family bank – was also an enthusiastic co-worker. It had been in Joseph John's company in 1817 (on the way to launch a Paris branch of the Bible Society) that Buxton had gained practical ideas for his influential prison reform pamphlet of the following year by inspecting continental models. In the years which followed Joseph John would become Buxton's valued ally in the cause of antislavery as well, and a presence in his own right in the Sunday observance and temperance movements.¹⁰⁵

To set Buxton in the company of his own adopted family and age-group is also to go a long way towards explaining how one major strand of moral reform commitment was forged in these years – in the heart of the *haut bourgeois* evangelical family. Buxton, by his own confession, had an unsettled and irregular upbringing: the Gurneys, by contrast, were conscious standard-setters in techniques of character formation from youth onwards. Here we find a first generation among prospering commercial elites to respond to the challenge of destabilised class relations by setting out to qualify themselves as models of earned privilege. Evangelical religion played a key role in this. It did so in part by giving an opportunity for individuals to gain redemption if they would only admit that 'we are all sinners before Christ'. It did so in equal part by placing on the family the responsibility of becoming a model of lived Christian values – the place in which the lesson of justice and mercy reconciled through Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin was taught and exemplified, and from which it could be presented as a 'hopeful allegory' for the development of relations between classes in the wider society.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, pp. 125–30.

¹⁰⁴ For Elizabeth Fry, see pp. 130–1. Samuel Hoare III, banker (1783–1847), was son of Samuel Hoare II (1751–1825), founder-member of the Quaker antislavery committee of 1783. Samuel III broke with his family's Quakerism to become a Churchman: F. R. Pryor (ed.), *Memoirs of Samuel Hoare by his Daughter Sarah and his Widow Hannah* (1911), pp. 17, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Braithwaite, *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney*, i.124, 218, 221, 419–21, and ii.302–4.

¹⁰⁶ Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, p. 213. See also Rosman, *Evangelicals*, ch. 4.

In the Gurney household it had been Elizabeth (from 1800 Mrs Fry) who set the pace by devising during the late 1790s a regime of personal self-discipline and of family segregation from the world of affluence, fashion and temptation. Yet, by the closing years of wartime, a similar sense of consciously disciplined commitment had appeared in the lives of her banker brother, Joseph John, and even of her ill-disciplined brother-in-law, Fowell Buxton.¹⁰⁷

By the standards of personal responsibility and emotional sensitivity set up in such family circles no person could ever assume his or her duty fully discharged: privilege had always to be acknowledged and paid for. In years of youth and inexperience, it was true, a certain tone of complacency might still be registered about the moral superiority of the upper-middle ranks of society over those socially above and below them. But age, bereavement and the shock of the post-war business cycle to commercial stability was eventually to bring home the message that God disciplined *all* levels of society, including the prudent and prosperous, into a sense of their own inadequacy.¹⁰⁸ Here Joseph John Gurney was at one with the aged Wilberforce whom he admiringly recalled, after the old man's death, as having defined mercy as 'kindness to the criminal who deserves punishment':

Ah! my dear children, if Wilberforce, who has been labouring for these fifty years, in the cause of virtue, religion, and humanity, can feel himself to be a poor criminal, with no hope of happiness but through the pardoning mercy of God in Christ Jesus, surely we ought all to be bowed down and broken under similar feelings!¹⁰⁹

But Wilberforce, in his youth, had been left to find his own way to this insight: the generation which followed turned the process of sensitisation into a family affair.

The fostering of family ties was also a large part of the message which moral reform leaders took with them when they moved into the world of moral destitution beyond the home base. As we have noted at the beginning of this chapter, the particular disorders which reformers identified among the post-war urban labouring classes were usually linked to a general preoccupation with the stability of family life. Vagrancy, begging, prostitution, juvenile street crime: all might be brought under control if family life could be restabilised. The industrially depressed fringes of the City of London to which the 'Spitalfields–Earlham circle' paid special attention in the post-war period certainly put such views to the test. Yet the intensity of effort which they put into their work of

¹⁰⁷ J. Kent, *Elizabeth Fry* (1962), pp. 16ff.; Braithwaite, *Memoirs of J. J. Gurney*, i.46–7, 79–81; Buxton, *Memoirs*, pp. 9–12. Cf. Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 148–51.

¹⁰⁸ Braithwaite, *J. J. Gurney*, i.90, 194, 206–7, 285–9, and see generally Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 31–5, 69–70.

¹⁰⁹ Braithwaite, *Gurney*, i.483, Joseph John Gurney to his children, 13 July 1833.

reclamation is a reflection of the intensity of their belief in the effectiveness of solutions based on the application of domestically shaped values.

Nowhere is this belief more apparent than in the lifetime commitment to moral reform of yet another of their extended circle – the Spitalfields Quaker silk merchant Peter Bedford (1780–1864). Bedford was a bachelor, early separated from his own family and thus, at first sight, an unlikely promoter of ‘family values’. But his pioneering work from the late war years onwards among the destitute and criminal youth of the city fringes, and his sustained efforts to organise elementary education and ‘social support services’ for this group, may be recognised as creating for him a surrogate family of dependants over which to preside.¹¹⁰ As well as this, of course, it earned for him the status of officially noticed social expert – a status which he (unlike his co-secretary at the Prison Discipline Society, William Crawford) resolutely declined to cash in for salaried public office. (Crawford was to be appointed H.M. Inspector of Prisons in 1836, the year in which Bedford retired from commercial life.¹¹¹) The temptation to professionalisation of position was, indeed, recurrently present for a variety of moral reform leaders in these years. It was, however, usually kept in check by a combined concern not to imperil claims to gentlemanly status, to usurp the role of the clergy (themselves reprofessionalising), or to be thought betrayers of the gospel of personal sympathy in cross-class relations by taking up state-bestowed powers of coercion.¹¹²

These, then, were some of the key leaders of post-war moral reform voluntarism. As hinted earlier, however, the metropolitan middle-class male character of the sample presented so far disqualifies them from any claim to represent the full range of activists. In practice, it was one of the strengths being built up for the future that the impulse to volunteer association was starting to spread among groups beyond these social limits.

A first illustration of this power to attract may be made by pointing to signs of sensitivity among the landed elite. The seventh earl of Shaftesbury – the

¹¹⁰ W. Tallack, *Peter Bedford* (1893), chs. 4–5.

¹¹¹ William Crawford (1788–1847), son of a Scots army captain turned London wine merchant, still awaits a biographer. The fullest present account is S. McConville, *A History of English Prison Administration* (1981), i.171–3, but that casts little light on the period of Crawford’s (presumably unpaid) contributions to moral reform between the time of his discharge from the Naval Transport Office in 1815 and his appointment as salaried state inspector of prisons in 1836.

¹¹² For the ‘uneasy’ position of men of marginal social status and not yet fully certified administrative/intellectual expertise, see generally J. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in 19th-Century Britain* (1986), pp. 88–9. For tensions associated with the parochial reprofessionalisation of the clergy, see Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 34–45, and note the particular relevance to London East End volunteer activists of the career of the Revd Daniel Wilson (1778–1858), Evangelical vicar of Islington, 1824–32 (thereafter bishop of Calcutta), pioneer advocate of district visiting systems of spiritual reclamation, and key patron of the LDOS.

ultimate archetype of aristocratic moral volunteer commitment – begins to make his reputation rather late for the present chapter (see chapter 4). The way forward to an evangelically modernised model ‘service aristocracy’ was, nonetheless, being explored during the post-war years – as we may gather from a glimpse of the career of Edward Harbord, third Lord Suffield (1781–1835).

Suffield was, of necessity, a transitional figure in this process of adaptation. It was not until very near the end of his life that he reached the point of conversion to the realisation that ‘he had had the opinion of the world too much in view, and that his alms had been given freely, because he felt it becoming his situation’.¹¹³ Still, the stages along the way from Regency hard living to domestic retirement, estate management, and growing concern with the poor-law-assisted demoralisation of the rural labouring classes, to re-emergence on the public scene as lonely campaigner on behalf of criminal law reform and slavery abolition in an unreceptive House of Lords – all these stages have a logic of development comparable to (if slower-paced than) the patterns of commitment already traced among the commercial middle classes.¹¹⁴ It comes as no surprise to discover that the crisis point of confidence in the post-war moral order came, for Suffield, in 1818–19: his decisive repudiation of post-war Tory government social policy as an unsustainable blend of neglect tempered with repression was in fact made (under J. J. Gurney’s influence) in response to Peterloo. From that point onwards, Suffield argued, a hereditary aristocracy was heading for deserved oblivion unless it could find a way of making itself ‘universally useful to the community’.¹¹⁵ (Others, it might be mentioned, came to their own crisis point over the moral legitimacy of caste privilege in the following year, at the time of the Queen Caroline affair.¹¹⁶)

Once he had committed himself to a career of ‘universal usefulness’ Suffield soon found himself well placed to make a major contribution to moral reform causes. His position as a member of the non-elected chamber of parliament ensured this. Even more valuable to moral reformers was the fact that he chose to emerge into public life as a Whig. There had been a strong element of Whiggish outrage at the people’s trust in government betrayed embedded in his decision to break with (Pittite Tory) family tradition in the after-shock of Peterloo. This Whiggish outlook helped in turn to smooth his relations with

¹¹³ Bacon, *Suffield*, p. 454.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5, 48, 399–400, 433. For general analysis of the spread of ‘Christian individualism’ among sections of the post-war landed classes (chiefly ‘liberal Tory’), see P. Mandler, ‘The Making of the New Poor Law *Redivivus*’, *Past and Present*, no. 117 (1987), pp. 131–57.

¹¹⁵ Bacon, *Suffield*, p. 344. Cf. pp. 85–97 (response to Peterloo), and 104–14, 127, 149 (commitment to ‘moral reform’). Suffield’s commitments by the mid-1820s included office in the Prison Discipline, Mendicity and Anti-Slavery Societies, the SPCA and the SDUK as well as active membership of the Norfolk quarter sessions bench.

¹¹⁶ Wilberforce, *Life*, v.54ff.; Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 105; and see generally Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 150–5.

Quaker Dissenters such as the Gurneys, for it was the Whig Party that, in the 1820s, re-emerged to play the role of champion to oppressed religious minorities in the campaign for the repeal of the Test Acts.¹¹⁷ It was the Whig Party, too, that could claim to have been most consistent in its support of the modernisation of the liberties of the individual on other fronts. The regular renewal of links with ‘the party of secular enlightenment’ was thus important: habits of co-operation re-established between religious and secular advocates of criminal law reform and antislavery during the 1820s played a vital part in keeping moral reform networks open during a period when tensions between evangelicals and ‘march of mind’ men in fields such as education were otherwise liable to bring about a major loss of trust.¹¹⁸

The second growth point for moral reform recruitment was, no doubt, more predictable than its appeal among an uneasily modernising landed elite. In fact, it is probably more accurately described as a point of revival rather than new growth – the revival taking place to replace the original growth blighted by the ideological frosts of the 1790s. The new growth took place in provincial England, most notably in the commercial centres of the midlands and the north-west. The new leaders usually established themselves at key points along the networks of communication of evangelical Dissent and especially in towns with Quaker communities. We have already noted the existence of the metropolitan sections of these networks. The key point to note at this stage of argument is, however, the increasing strength of the reverse flow along the network – messages to London rather than from it. By the late 1820s signs of that early Victorian burst of urban provincial confidence in the superiority of self-made over inherited reputation are already clear to see. Two men increasingly influential among moral reformers whose careers illustrate this provincial tone are James Cropper of Liverpool and Joseph Sturge of Birmingham.

Cropper (1773–1840), we must first admit, did not emerge on the national stage as a totally unknown provincial. (His links with William Allen, begun at the Quaker yearly meeting for 1816, and with the Macaulay family, secured by intermarriage over two generations, gave him entry passes to London reform circles which he used to some effect.¹¹⁹) Yet his views of the world and of how to improve it were far more structurally ‘advanced’ than those of his London allies. In his favourite cause – that of Negro slaves – Cropper asserted not merely the right of slaves to recognition of their human individuality but the moral superiority of a world made more efficient by the adoption of the principles of Adam Smith. Moral modernisation demanded that all economic

¹¹⁷ On the ‘liberal Tory’ tendencies of most Church Evangelical MPs during the post-war era, see Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 205ff.

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., *Life of Allen*, ii.429–30, and iii.13–14, 175, 198, 219.

¹¹⁹ Davis, ‘James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1821–1823’, p. 244; J. Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay. The Shaping of the Historian* (1973), p. 269.

relations be negotiated between parties freely contracting. This did not mean that Cropper was immune from doubt about the justice of capitalist systems of profit distribution. His 'morally exposed' position as partner in Liverpool's biggest firm for the import of East Indian (non-slave-produced) sugar ensured sensitivity to critics on that front. Eventually the burden of moral leadership became too much and Cropper was to spend his last years in rural retreat, apparently trying to recapture through his agricultural training schemes for young labourers the moral simplicities of his own pre-commercial farming youth.¹²⁰

Cropper's new approach to the problem of slavery did, nonetheless, encourage the creative fusion of religious with business principles of argument and organisation. We have already seen how formative Cropper's influence had been on the organisational history of the antislavery movement in the early 1820s – and his influence did not stop short at that point. His further efforts to turn the mobilisation of public opinion into a professional business were to bring him once again to the centre of the movement in its late 20s and early 30s 'immediatist' phase when he led the way in promoting the use of full-time paid agents. (For the work of the Agency Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society, see p. 132.)

By this stage, Cropper himself was being outflanked by a younger generation of zealots – activists who shared his sense of non-metropolitan independence yet who had also been shaped by the experience of shared evangelical commitment not fully available to those who had grown to adulthood in a pre-Bible Society age. The lurch to moral millennialism which resulted is illustrated neatly in the career of Cropper's eventual (1834) son-in-law, Joseph Sturge (1793–1859). Cropper and Sturge, though separated by twenty years in age, had much in common. Both were first-generation businessmen, sons of Quaker small farmers experienced in estate management. Both were skilful adaptors to the economic opportunities opened up by industrial and commercial growth, as their clutch of railway company directorships indicates. Both, too, shared recurrent pangs of moral doubt about the legitimacy of profits gained from speculation rather than 'safe and regular methods of business'; and each took to a compensatory rhetoric of 'stewardship' to keep such doubts at bay.¹²¹ Yet Sturge had a romantic evangelical sense of the tension between what was expedient in this world and what the Almighty demanded for salvation which, time and again, took him well beyond his older colleagues into a world of expressive action which might sometimes alarm his own allies even as he strove to expand the limits of the politically possible. Such determination to witness against sin made him an early convert to the 'immediatist' demand for the unconditional abolition

¹²⁰ Davis, 'James Cropper . . . 1821–1823', pp. 242–6; 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823–1833', *Journal of Negro History*, 46 (1961), p. 171. See also Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 24–5, 35.

¹²¹ Davis, 'James Cropper . . . 1821–1823', pp. 242–4; A. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (1987), pp. 31–3.

of slavery – an embarrassment to Buxton in the parliamentary negotiations to end slavery on terms of financial compensation to owners in 1833 – and, finally, the hero of the movement after his unexpectedly successful campaign (1837–8) to abolish the continuing apprenticeship provisions of the 1833 Act outright.¹²²

Why Sturge should have felt the need to bear witness so vehemently is a question which remains impossible to resolve in full. We can suggest, as we have done, a generational cleavage as part of the context of explanation. Sturge's highly volatile business career and his occupation as a corn merchant had probably an even greater impact in keeping the threshold of social insecurity and sensitivity to moral challenge low. But there is also a personal psychology of anxiety faced, and embraced, which distinguishes Sturge even from the less scruple-prone brother he left to manage the everyday affairs of the family business in 1831 in order to secure his own release for a full-time career as leader of the 'moral radical party'. This personality trait became even more firmly fixed after the loss in 1835 of both wife and daughter in childbirth. After this, 'Christian philanthropy' became a therapy of reassurance – a way 'through the boundless mercy of a crucified Redeemer' of 'find[ing] forgiveness for my sins, though they are, indeed, as the sand of the sea'.¹²³

The death of Eliza Sturge in 1835 did more than deprive one moral crusader of his wife and another of his daughter: it also deprived the antislavery movement of one of its more experienced and long-serving activists, a fact which draws our attention to a third major source of new recruits to moral reform activities in this generation. As with husbands, sons, brothers, so with wives, daughters, sisters. The development was, of course, associated directly with evangelical assumptions about family and gender roles and (less directly but still tenaciously) with residual Rousseauist assumptions about female capacities for emotional empathy. 'Woman's mission' was to export the moral education she provided in the home but not beyond the point at which she herself started to become contaminated by the activity. In Wilberforce's classic words of judgement on female antislavery associations:

I own I cannot relish the plan. All private exertions for such an object become their [i.e. women's] character, but for ladies to meet, to publish, to go from house to house stirring up petitions – these appear to me proceedings unsuited to the female character as delineated in Scripture. And though we should limit the interference of our ladies to the cause of justice and humanity, I fear its tendency would be to mix them in all the multiform warfare of political life.¹²⁴

¹²² *Ibid.*, chs. 5–7. ¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 33, 63–4.

¹²⁴ Wilberforce, *Life*, v.264, Wilberforce to T. Babington, 31 Jan. 1826. Note, however, that Wilberforce admitted that his view was not shared universally in male antislavery circles. For full context, see C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery. The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (1992), pp. 48–9; A. Tyrrell, "'Woman's Mission' and Pressure-Group Politics in Britain (1825–60)", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 63 (1980–1), p. 205.

Male encouragement of women's volunteer participation was, therefore, usually restricted to encouragement of their role as fund-raisers and parish or community visitors rather than policy-makers. Yet it had to be recognised that in some aspects of moral reform – animal welfare and antislavery in particular – the support of women made the difference between growth and stagnation, even survival and collapse.¹²⁵ And this recognition, underpinned as it was by evangelical-romantic acknowledgement of female superiority in moral and emotional sensitivity, gave some women a chance to move towards leadership roles in both policy formation and organisation. Once again a sketch of two overlapping 'lives in moral reform' allows us to glimpse some of the psycho-social forces interacting to produce this result.

Elizabeth Heyrick (1769–1831) is now chiefly remembered for her inspirational work as a pioneer publicist of the case for *Immediate not Gradual Abolition of Slavery* (1824), Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845) for her work of moral reclamation among female prisoners. In practice, both women also played significant parts in the organisation of volunteer networks independent of male control. Heyrick was treasurer of the Leicester branch of the Female Society for the Relief of British Negro Slaves – an association founded in Birmingham in April 1825 with the object of mobilising women on a national basis in the antislavery cause.¹²⁶ Fry was founder-president of the British Society of Ladies for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners, set up in 1821 to co-ordinate the activities of the string of local women's committees which had sprung up to support the objectives of the Prison Discipline Society as interpreted and applied to female prisoners by Mrs Fry.¹²⁷

In many respects the origins of the sense of commitment which these two women shared may be traced to social and cultural environments of the sort we have seen shaping the commitment of leading male activists. Both Heyrick (née Coltman) and Fry (née Gurney) emerged from families in which material prosperity was taken largely as assured but cultural security was not. (The

¹²⁵ The support available from women in the early SPCA is first acknowledged in its minute book entries of 20 June 1829 and 5 April 1830, and more enthusiastically recognised/exploited in its *Report No. 6* (1832), p. 14, and *Report No. 7* (1833), p. 32 (by which stage the proportion of women subscribers was 44 per cent and rising). For women as fund-raisers for the antislavery movement, see Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 52–3, 115–16. For early temperance efforts to mobilise female support, see *BFTS Report No. 3* (1834), p. 44; and see generally Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, ch. 1.

¹²⁶ K. Corfield, 'Elizabeth Heyrick: Radical Quaker', in G. Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760–1930* (1986), p. 43; Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge*, pp. 49–53; Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 43–9.

¹²⁷ *British Society of Ladies for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners: Sketch of the Origin and Results of Ladies' Prison Associations, with Hints for the Formation of Local Associations* (1827), pp. 17–20. Fry's national prison tour of 1820 had prepared the way for the setting up of seventeen local associations, now forming the branches of the new central society: Fry and Cresswell, *Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, i.366–7. See also L. Zedner, *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 116–22.

Coltmans were a Unitarian family of hosiery manufacturers from Leicester, the Gurneys a Norwich banking family drifting with prosperity away from a Quaker past.) Both, too, underwent some form of conversion experience in the course of the ideology-charged 1790s, Heyrick from Unitarianism to Quakerism, Fry (as we have already noted) from residual to a more personally committed form of Quakerism.¹²⁸

Yet the fact that they were women in an age increasingly given to intellectualised forms of gender labelling also and necessarily shaped both their impulses to become committed and the responses of the males with whom they dealt in the ‘public’ world they entered. To a certain point being a woman was an advantage: women from reliably propertied backgrounds were assumed to be driven by mothering and family instincts when they took to their experiments of moral and spiritual sensitisation. Many were so driven.¹²⁹ Male authorities also accepted, at this experimental stage, that such women had valuable skills of domestic management which might well be worth applying to the management of demoralised public institutions.

There remained, though, a limit beyond which romanticised and evangelically empowered womanhood found it difficult to pass. To be Quaker helped to stretch that limit a little further – as Elizabeth Heyrick demonstrated by her pioneering challenges to the received wisdoms both of political economy and of ‘gradualism’ as a political strategy. Elizabeth Fry, too, gained the confidence needed to question the self-defeating brutality of incompetent public officialdom only after securing her recognition as a called minister within her own Quaker circle in 1811.¹³⁰

In the longer run there was still a penalty to be paid for overrunning gender boundaries. Elizabeth Heyrick’s ‘impracticality’ as a strategist made her reputation in antislavery circles in life and death alike as much a tribute to sentimental female excess as to solid political achievement. Elizabeth Fry’s reputation, while more securely transformed to public celebrity status, was also a reputation made vulnerable to charges of sentimentality. Long before she died in 1845 she had lost control over the shaping of prison policy.¹³¹ This setback

¹²⁸ Corfield, ‘Elizabeth Heyrick’, pp. 42, 57; Kent, *Elizabeth Fry*, pp. 16–18. Cf. Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, pp. 150–3.

¹²⁹ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 147–8; but cf. Kent, *Elizabeth Fry*, pp. 31–3, on the precise context of Fry’s first visits to Newgate gaol.

¹³⁰ For Heyrick’s Quaker evangelical critique of gradualism, see Corfield, ‘Elizabeth Heyrick’, p. 43. Her critique of political economy as ‘un-Christian’ (pp. 54–7) seems to preserve traces of nostalgic commitment to the natural rights assumptions of her Unitarian youth. For Fry’s status as a Quaker minister and its influence on her charitable motives and goals, see Kent, *Elizabeth Fry*, pp. 25–33. Her enthusiasm for district visiting and qualms about Mendicity Society attempts to enforce the laws of political economy are set out in Fry and Cresswell, *Memoir*, i.452–6.

¹³¹ Corfield, ‘Elizabeth Heyrick’, pp. 47–50; Kent, *Elizabeth Fry*, pp. 80, 106ff.; and see following section of this chapter.

was, perhaps, not all loss, given the mixed success of 'reformed' public institutions in reshaping their inmates over the early Victorian period. It did, however, by signalling a more strictly policed divide between public and private spheres of activity, help to ensure that, in future, male and female visions of moral reform, and motives for committing themselves to it, would tend to diverge.

Law-making and law enforcement in the age of antislavery

Now that we have sketched in something of the collective character of the post-war generation of moral reform leaders, the way lies open to explore the means by which these leaders sought to achieve their aims – and also to recount the response their activities evoked in the wider society.

Later generations of activists, when they looked back, often identified the post-war period as a time of particular significance and it is simple enough to work out why. In brief, these were the decades in which public life was transformed by a key set of structural adaptations (many of them 'delayed' since the 'enlightened era' of the dimly remembered 1780s). Given this situation it was inevitable that those seeking to influence public policy should also adapt their methods of operation to exploit new opportunity.

The pace-setting moral reform movement from this perspective was necessarily going to be the antislavery cause, and the lesson which later generations were to draw from the legislative victory conceded by the first parliament to be elected on the basis of the 1832 Reform Act was that mobilisation of 'public opinion' was the key to success. The Anti-Slavery Society had taken to the co-ordinated national network of organisation. It had adopted and made respectable the mass petition. Its more assertive provincial leaders had pioneered the mass public meeting and the professional paid agent and, when London leaders had hesitated to associate the cause too closely with electoral politics, had in 1831 financed the breakaway Agency Committee of the society to ensure that mobilisation continued.¹³² It was the Agency Committee (or Society, as it became in 1832), which claimed credit for extracting pledges of support from 132 candidates at the 1832 general election returned as MPs; it was the Agency Committee and its Female Society allies who gathered 1.5 million signatures (187,000 of the female petition signatures in ten days) for presentation to parliament in 1833; and it was the Agency Committee's leaders who claimed to have kept the parliamentary leaders of the cause up to the mark set by principle once the responsibility of drafting a law to abolish colonial slavery had been taken up by government.¹³³ There is little doubt that the degree of commitment antislavery activists claimed to have mobilised among electors

¹³² Anti-Slavery Society minute books E2/3, fos. 89–97, 121, 124; *The Agency Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society. Report* (1832), pp. 1–3.

¹³³ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 65–6; Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 70–4; Tyrrell, *Sturge*, pp. 52–7.

from 1832 onwards was taken seriously by those dealing with them. ‘The fact is, Buxton, the West Indians object, not only to your friends, but to every body who has any constituents’, as Lord Althorp, government leader in the House of Commons, conceded while discussing the composition of the select committee appointed in an abortive effort to reach a compromise solution to the issue in the aftermath of yet another slave revolt.¹³⁴ A similar mobilisation in 1837–8 ensured the premature abandonment of apprenticeship as a transition stage to slave emancipation.¹³⁵

Yet it is less than the whole truth to present the antislavery mobilisation of the late 1820s and early 30s as typical either of moral reform general aspiration or of irreversible leader commitment to electoral action. It has recently been pointed out how patchy and discontinuous antislavery mobilisation was over the years between 1787 and 1833, and even over the years 1823 to 1833. The sentiment against slavery was, admittedly, spread widely through urban society: the organisation of local opinion in fund-raising, petitioning or consumer pledges against slave-grown produce was, nonetheless, heavily dependent on cues given by London, Liverpool, or maybe Birmingham, and these cues were not given indiscriminately.¹³⁶ Just as Wilberforce in the 1790s had warned against the self-defeating tactic of encouraging mass action of a Jacobin tinge, so Buxton in the 1820s and 30s refused to the end to accept the role of people’s tribune in a House of Commons still suspicious of the legitimacy of ‘pressure from without’. Buxton’s awareness of the dangers of associating a national cause with sectional interest groups, it is true, sometimes led him to encourage balancing counter-mobilisations of his own (as when he feared, rightly as it turned out, that the antislavery provincial networks were being ‘captured’ by evangelical Dissent from the older-style alliances of Dissenting evangelicals with Unitarians and Churchmen).¹³⁷ But there were definite tactical limits to the degree of popular mobilisation he (and most other leaders bar Sturge) thought it wise to attempt if the parliamentary classes were to be kept on side. Apart from anything else, it was not the purpose of the antislavery leaders to propagate generally a rhetoric of exploitation which might be taken up with all too little discrimination by the self-proclaimed ‘wage slaves’ of industrialising England.¹³⁸ Moral

¹³⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 303. ¹³⁵ Tyrrell, *Sturge*, ch. 7.

¹³⁶ Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, ch. 3, esp. pp. 54–9, and pp. 80–1. Cf. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, pp. 85–96, further developed in S. Drescher, ‘Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade’, *Past and Present*, no. 143 (1994), pp. 136–66, though still without attempting to identify the mechanisms by which provincial mobilisation was achieved in petition and public meeting campaigns. On my reading, it could not have been done without recourse to the evangelical voluntary society networks relied on by Cropper in his first mobilisation scheme of 1823 (see note 64 above).

¹³⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, pp. 311, 338; Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 86, 96; and see generally P. Hollis, ‘Introduction’, in *Pressure from Without*, pp. 1–26.

¹³⁸ G. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 64–7. On Sturge and the radical appeal to mobilisation along lines pioneered by O’Connell’s Catholic Association, see Tyrrell, *Sturge*, p. 52.

modernisation for the majority of antislavery leaders meant acceptance of the laws of the market and of political economy – in principle at least – as the overlapping activities of antislavery and other less publicity-raising moral reform associations demonstrate.

The ‘normal’ relationship between reformers, law-makers and state authorities in the years after 1815 was far more likely to be collusive than confrontational. This is not the same as saying that reform leaders felt comfortable with all state institutions or officials. The Mendicity Society, as we have seen, felt especially torn between assisting poor law authorities and counteracting the socially inefficient consequences their activities produced until the principles of political economy were finally partially recognised in the New Poor Law of 1834. The Prison Discipline Society felt little trust in the uniform and enlightened administration of gaols until they could install one of their own in the state inspectorate created under the terms of the 1835 Prisons Act, for which they had long lobbied. The SPCA was continually complaining of the way in which restrictive interpretation of Martin’s Act by magistrates thwarted its work until the extended Animal Cruelty Act of 1835 could be sponsored by its MP supporters. Even the Vice Society had its problems with magistrates and with their definition of what constituted a ‘public place’ for purposes of obscene publication until a discreet appearance before a parliamentary committee could procure an 1838 amendment to the Vagrant Act.¹³⁹ In all these cases, however, the work of gaining remedies was carried out by lobbying within parliamentary or administrative circles rather than by petition, pledging or, for the most part, public meeting. Even the LDOS – less successful in lobbying for an updated definition of the behaviour it sought to regulate and therefore more inclined to turn to the mass petition – began its activities by testing the influence of its existing MP supporters, clerical (Bishop Blomfield of London) and lay.¹⁴⁰

Much the same preference to be accepted as allies of authority marks the efforts of many volunteer associations to act as citizen enforcers of those laws which they did regard as adequate. As we have already glimpsed, the policing option was high on the list of experimental activities of a whole range of those societies formed after 1815 to pursue specialist goals of moral reclamation. Among these groups it was the Guardian Society which moved first to take up the task, but the most tenacious private prosecution systems set up were those operated by the Mendicity Society and by the SPCA. Both these societies employed paid agents from the start of their operations, often with impressive effect.

¹³⁹ Roberts, ‘Reshaping the Gift Relationship’, pp. 219–20; W. Forsythe, *The Reform of Prisoners 1830–1900* (1987), pp. 25–6; *SPCA. Report No. 10* (1836), p. 5; HC SC on Metropolis Police Offices, *PP* 1837–8 (578), xv.494–5.

¹⁴⁰ LDOS minute books, 20 May 1831 and 21 Feb. 1832.

The Mendicity Society had fewest qualms about the moral implications of relying on law enforcement and so became the eager ally of urban authorities in attempting to extend surveillance to the point where apprehension of offenders approached a plausibly Benthamite level of certainty.¹⁴¹ SPCA opinion was always more divided on the legitimacy and social effects of law enforcement as a policy. Its founder, the Revd Arthur Broome, had declared his ‘strong aversion to prosecuting societies’ at the SPCA’s inaugural public meeting on the familiar grounds that they were likely to be viewed as over-powerful, and their agents as over-zealous or venal in motive.¹⁴² The SPCA did, however, quickly move to employ paid inspectors. It moved also, under the management of Gompertz, into the business of selective prosecution: the motive seems to have been to obtain educational publicity via example-setting rather than tighter policing as an end in itself.¹⁴³

Even so, it took only until 1832 for the SPCA to face revolt from within and without as the Vice Society had faced before it. If part of the charge against Gompertz in 1832 was that he was not an evangelical Protestant, an equal part of the charge concerned a crisis in relations with magistrates and public opinion brought about by Gompertz’s enthusiasm for informer-supported prosecutions. Faced with a backlash from the London press and some of its own paternalistically inclined subscribers, ‘Mr Martin’s Club for the patronising of informers’ was forced to reconsider its methods of operation. Its own inspectors were dismissed, and its unpaid (and therefore credible) committee members enlisted in their place for the task of occasional citizen-instituted prosecution in cases where ‘admonition’ had failed to have effect.¹⁴⁴ The adjustment, nevertheless, cost the association a significant part of its existing support, as disgruntled opponents of the policy of prosecution defected first in one direction and disgruntled Gompertz supporters eventually in another.¹⁴⁵

Matters had also been complicated for volunteer law enforcement agents by this time to the degree that their work was taken over from 1829 onwards by Peel’s New Police. (This was officially a metropolitan force but detachments were available to the Home Office to use in provincial situations where local authorities proved unable or unwilling to enforce London-defined standards of public order.¹⁴⁶) In practice, as chapter 4 will reveal, there were reasons why

¹⁴¹ Roberts, ‘Reshaping’, pp. 217–18. ¹⁴² *The Times*, 17 June 1824, p. 3.

¹⁴³ SPCA minute books, vol. i, fos. 22, 30, 72, 110. Cf. Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, pp. 145–6; Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 91–2.

¹⁴⁴ RSPCA records, vol. v, fos. 15, 22 ff.; *Report No. 6* (1832), pp. 58–9; *Report No. 7* (1833), pp. 7–8.

¹⁴⁵ RSPCA records, vol. v, fos. 9–10 (‘Association for Promoting Rational Humanity towards the Animal Creation’), 66ff. (Gompertz’s ‘Animal’s Friend Society’).

¹⁴⁶ The classic example of transfer of responsibility from volunteer to ‘official’ police is the suppression of the Stamford bull-run in 1837–9 (see chapter 4). For the origins of SPCA involvement in the matter, see minute books, vol. i, fos. 128–30 (Oct.–Nov. 1830).

some moral reform activists should find New Police priorities in law enforcement inadequate, so that by the mid-1830s both Mendicity Society (1834) and SPCA (1837) constables were back on the beat.¹⁴⁷

For the short term, however, the increasing willingness of state authorities to accept responsibility for a more detailed regulation of public order encouraged activists to search for their 'true' role in the field of social mediation rather than law enforcement. Law enforcement was expensive, even to those in volunteer combination: it was convenient to pass the burden to public authorities if they were prepared to carry out the work efficiently.¹⁴⁸ More persuasive still, volunteers had re-learned the lesson that law enforcement carried out efficiently made enemies as well as friends. The 1820s crisis point in debate about the need for new standards of urban policing thus overlapped with a period of considerable strain in relations between volunteer activists and substantial sections of the public they claimed to be serving. We have just noticed how some of this strain made its impact on the SPCA. Other societies faced similar attacks.

The most predictable critics of volunteer police efforts were the tradition-upholding defenders of English liberties against the powers of the state. Like Cobbett and Sydney Smith in a previous age, critics such as Joseph Hume found the activities of the Vice Society in the 1820s 'little more than conspiracies against the liberties of the subject'. The conspiracy charge was one the new post-war societies also had to parry (Hume's own Mendicity Society among them), as they did the familiar charges of venality and malicious prosecution by their agents, and class bias in their policing activities generally.¹⁴⁹ Outside parliament, the respectable Whig and not so respectable radical press could be guaranteed to publicise and oppose most systematic attempts at the policing of morals.¹⁵⁰ From time to time also – in society reports and police court proceedings – the voices of the 'objects' of volunteer policing attention could be heard in echo of the charge that their custom-sanctioned immunities were being removed by interfering fanatics.¹⁵¹ Critics such as these were, however, not as tactically well placed in the part-professionalised authority structures of the 1820s as they once had been; and volunteer leaders themselves had now

¹⁴⁷ *Mendicity Society. Report No. 16* (1834), pp. 16–17; *SPCA. Report No. 12* (1838), pp. 8–9.

¹⁴⁸ E.g., *Mendicity Society. Report No. 8* (1826), p. 26, and *Report No. 13* (1831), pp. 21–7. Note also the radical suggestion of the PDS in its *Report No. 7* (1827), pp. 47–8, that a 'public prosecutor' be introduced in imitation of Scots practice.

¹⁴⁹ *PD*, 2 ser., viii.709. See also Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 119, for a similar attack by Hume on the SPCA. For criticism of Hume's own Mendicity Society on precisely the same grounds, see *Mendicity Society. Report No. 8* (1826), p. 33; 'Castigator', *The Mendicity Society Unmasked* (1825), pp. 3, 50.

¹⁵⁰ For an 1820s 'test case', see Roberts, 'Public and Private', pp. 273–94.

¹⁵¹ Roberts, 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship', p. 224. Note also the continuing problem of 'crowd rescue' of offenders from arresting agents: *Mendicity Society. Report No. 3* (1821), p. 10.

become politically experienced enough in many instances to know when to expect – and how to counter – such outbursts.¹⁵²

More unsettling forms of criticism came in practice from actual or potential allies in the moral reform cause itself – that is, from those prepared to distinguish ‘true liberty’ from mere licence but prepared still to doubt that law enforcement alone would change habitual patterns of behaviour. To change these patterns, it was argued, individuals would need to be educated to feel a sense of moral self-responsibility – and of shame in transgression if committed. This was a psychological state unlikely to be achieved in the atmosphere of resentment created by the arbitrary or impersonal enforcement of laws. Two brief case studies will serve to indicate the tone and direction of debate within moral reform circles as it evolved during the 1820s and early 30s.

For the first of these case studies we rely on materials generated by the debate about the nature of ‘true charity’ as provoked by the activities of the Mendicity Society. We have noted when exploring the early history of this society (see p. 107) how the morality of the secular science of political economy aroused certain anxieties among the biblically driven even as they admitted the need to distinguish between deserving and less deserving objects of their charity. As intolerance of the propertied classes towards public waste and disorder steadily grew, the dilemma of the Christian giver grew with it. The Mendicity Society, naturally, sought to exploit this struggle between ‘heart’ and ‘head’ to its own advantage, and generally it succeeded. If a tightening of economic and social discipline was inevitable, it argued, then it was just as well to have a mediating voluntary agency to hand to cushion the immediate effects – to give the poor time to adjust and a reason for not losing faith in the benevolent intention of the propertied.¹⁵³ It was also more benevolent to leave to volunteer action the classification (after inquiry) of the ‘truly’ needy when, otherwise, they might be herded by indiscriminate police action to the magistrates’ court and the house of correction.

But how to make the classification, and on what grounds? These were problems the Mendicity Society eventually resolved, though only at some cost in reputation. The earliest hope had been to conscript the society’s own board of management to the task of inquiring into the true needs and deservingness of clients referred to them.¹⁵⁴ This system of ‘hands-on’ benevolence by fair-minded and incorruptible gentlemen would have been a triumph of volunteer commitment if it had worked, but it did not. Gentlemen proved too unreliable

¹⁵² E.g., *SPCA. Report No. 9* (1835), p. 29; cf. Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 120.

¹⁵³ *Mendicity Society. Report No. 2* (1820), pp. 19–21, and *No. 18* (1836), p. 13.

¹⁵⁴ Clients were referred to the society by subscribers who, when approached for money, would give instead a ticket redeemable at the society’s offices for a night’s food and shelter after interview.

in attendance, too inconsistent in administrative decision-making, to take the society through more than its first three years.¹⁵⁵ The unexpectedly large numbers of clients claiming to be willing to work yet unable by reason of seasonal or trade conditions to find employment also posed a problem. How to test willingness to work when no work was available? Which was more truly charitable: to refuse relief as an inducement to prudent patterns of saving in future – or to provide make-work schemes to protect present habits of industry against erosion? Furthermore, what to do with the large number of beggars (sometimes a majority of observed cases) who, as children, could not be held responsible for their own actions in any case?¹⁵⁶ To overcome these problems the society was driven to centralise and professionalise its operations. A standard work test was introduced as a way of screening applicants. (In this way the society associated itself with a variety of experiments in labour-market discipline eventually accepted as standard practice in the workhouses of the New Poor Law.) A full-time salaried manager was also appointed to replace the gentleman amateurs.

In this way operational efficiency was achieved, but not in quite the socially healing way that evangelicals and social traditionalists had been led to expect. The most public explosion of distrust which followed this realisation came in 1824 when *The Times* revealed that the management expenses of the society were absorbing two-thirds of its subscriber income and that the salary of the ‘honorary’ manager (W. H. Bodkin) was costing an amount equivalent to the relief costs of 750 mendicants at the society’s current rates.¹⁵⁷ An extraordinary general meeting had to be convened under Sturges Bourne’s chairmanship to reassert the society’s identity as a charity-*organising* body against *The Times*’s misrepresentation of it as charity-*distributing* body fallen into the hands of self-seeking, ungentlemanly, pseudo-experts. Shortly afterwards, Clapham evangelicals, led by Wilberforce, publicly recommitted themselves to the cause and the society claimed to have emerged from the controversy with its reputation confirmed and strengthened.¹⁵⁸ This claim was probably broadly correct at the level of official opinion. Yet a recurrent strain of biblically inspired protest continued to surface among those who rejected screened giving by proxy as a betrayal of Christian obligation: ‘But whoso hath this world’s goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?’¹⁵⁹ And, in practical terms, the Mendicity Society’s

¹⁵⁵ Roberts, ‘Reshaping’, pp. 216–17. ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹⁵⁷ *The Times*, 17 Jan. 1824, pp. 2–3. Bodkin felt compelled to sue *The Times* for libel as a result of its report and eventually received an unsympathetic thirty shillings damages from his jury: *ibid.*, 17 July 1824, pp. 2–3, and 19 July, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1824, p. 2, 5 March, p. 3, 12 March, p. 4; *Mendicity Society Report No. 6* (1824), p. 23.

¹⁵⁹ 1 John 3: 17, cited by ‘Castigator’, *Mendicity Society Unmasked*, p. 23.

aspirations to control cross-class personal giving were implicitly challenged and partially displaced from the mid-1820s onwards by the spread among urban evangelical activists of district visiting societies for *mixed* evangelising and charitable purposes. These much more community-centred volunteer activities were particularly attractive to middle-class evangelical women whose experience of ‘domiciliary visitation’ was being extended by their canvassing activities on behalf of the Bible Society and the antislavery movement.¹⁶⁰ The laws of political economy were not likely to be applied with any consistency to the urban poor under this mixed system of volunteer experiment – though district visitors were as keen in their own way to encourage prudent management of resources by the poor as Mendicity Society board members.¹⁶¹

As charity organisers had their critics both inside and outside their movement, so too had prison reformers. Indeed, in turning to survey the mutating policy prescriptions and the reputation of the prison discipline movement, we find in even more exaggerated form the same pattern – a first eruption of ideologically charged volunteer enthusiasm slowing in the face of a task more complex than first thought, adapting to incorporate bureaucratised procedures carried out by professional managers, with results not easy for ‘sentimental’ critics to accept.

Elizabeth Fry and her reform companions had set out in great hope after their first limited experiments in ‘tendering’ hardened prisoners to spread the message that a gaol could be turned from a holding tank of moral contagion to ‘a school of moral discipline’. And indeed there had been a willing and influential audience for the Prison Discipline Society message that ‘reformation’ could be achieved without lessening the criminal’s sense of suffering, yet without stimulating, either, that ‘feeling of injury [and] resentment’ which appeared to have made traditional methods of punishment socially counter-productive. ‘Seclusion from vicious associates’ and training in ‘habits of order and application’, combined with systematic ‘religious instruction’, were held out as capable of producing a reborn citizen – one willing to admit past transgression and trained to act in future as ‘a moral agent, and an accountable being’.¹⁶²

Yet early acclaim for reclamatory methods very soon gave way to more suspicious evaluation of lasting results in the transformation of prisoner behaviour. The trigger was the public turbulence of the Peterloo years, but the questions posed were not easy to brush away in the twenty years which followed. If, as statistics and experience seemed to indicate, modern market-driven society

¹⁶⁰ Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 34–9; H. D. Rack, ‘Domestic Visitation: A Chapter in Early 19th-Century Evangelism’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 24 (1973), pp. 357ff., esp. 361–7; and see generally Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 97ff.

¹⁶¹ E.g., ‘Prospectus’ of the District Visiting Society (*Record*, 20 Nov. 1828, p. 1) noted its goals as including the inculcation of ‘habits of order, morality, and religion’. Cf. Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 41–2.

¹⁶² *PDS. Report No. 4* (1822), pp. 13–17.

was more plagued by criminal activity than ever before, then what sense did it make to provide conditions and employment opportunities in prisons superior to those available to honest labourers outside?

Mrs Fry is an amiable and excellent woman . . . but her's [sic] is not the method to stop crimes. In prisons which are really meant to keep the multitude in order, and to be a terror to evil doers, there must be no sharing of profits – no visiting of friends – . . . There must be a great deal of solitude . . . hard, incessant, irksome, eternal labour; a planned and regulated and unrelenting exclusion of happiness and comfort.¹⁶³

In spite of occasional later attempts to point out that tightened standards of public order themselves manufactured more law-breakers, key male members of the prison discipline movement came fairly readily to agree with this perspective. The result was a 'routinisation' of reclamation methods and a specialisation of professional knowledge about prison management which, by the mid-1820s, had turned the Prison Discipline Society into a fighting advocate of the treadmill as the ideal reclaiming device and, by the mid-30s, had catapulted the society's leaders into positions of influence with central government officials – even into salaried official positions themselves.¹⁶⁴ (William Crawford, the society's secretary, was appointed inaugural co-Inspector of Prisons for the Home District under the Act of 1835.) Once the state had started to invest material resources in the implementation of a selected portion of the moral reform agenda, and had also appointed salaried male officials to oversee the process, the options open to volunteer reformers left outside the system contracted visibly.

The most immediate effects were experienced by members of ladies' committees. Elizabeth Fry's Newgate committee was itself damned with the faint praise of being well-intentioned but amateurish in its sentimental expectation of personal reclamation of prisoners in the first report of the Inspectors of Prisons after their appointment in 1835.¹⁶⁵ Mrs Fry, true to evangelical and Dissenting tradition, continued to press the volunteer role as an essential check on the abuse of official power, bureaucratically exercised:

She shrank from the abuses to which the solitary system [of prison custody] is liable. How soon might the cell become an oubliette, how short the transition from kind and constant attention, to cruelty and neglect; how entirely the comfort, nay the existence of a prisoner, must depend upon his keeper's will; and what was human nature, to be trusted with such responsibility? . . . They may be building, though they little think it, dungeons for their children and their children's children, if times of religious persecution or political disturbance should return.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ [Sydney Smith], *Edinburgh Review*, 36 (Feb. 1822), p. 374.

¹⁶⁴ *PDS. Report No. 8* (1832), pp. 48–9. Cf. *Report No. 4* (1822), pp. 33–4, *No. 5* (1823), pp. 34–8, and *No. 6* (1824), pp. 49–51 (advocacy of treadmill).

¹⁶⁵ Kent, *Elizabeth Fry*, ch. 5, esp. pp. 121ff.

¹⁶⁶ Cited in A. Summers, 'Philanthropy and the State in the Thinking of Elizabeth Fry', *Historical Research*, 67 (163) (1994), p. 139, from the original in Fry and Cresswell, *Memoirs*, ii.287.

But she and her one-time male support base among the visiting magistracy and clergy were, if not silenced by co-option to the new system, now outsiders dependent on state authorisation to do what work of social reintegration they could manage (chiefly in assistance given prisoners after release), and hobbled by their reputation for well-meaning amateurism.¹⁶⁷ The footholds in public esteem they managed to secure on behalf of the volunteer reclamatory ideal were footholds validated by ‘sentiment’ rather than ‘reason’. In short, their work was to be among those whom late Hanoverian society could not bring itself to categorise as morally independent beings – young women and, above all, children.¹⁶⁸ Work carried out among such groups created footholds with considerable potential but the fact that they amounted to nothing more than footholds was, for the moment, clear to see.

We began this chapter by pointing to the ambivalent way in which historians have tended to portray developments in English public life over the post-war decades. We may now end it by adopting a similarly stereoscopic approach in summing up exertions made in the name of moral reform.

From one angle what we see most vividly is the triumphant completion of a middle-class mission: volunteer associations for moral reform have become a major organisational device for the experimental adjustment of relations between propertied and unpropertied in a market-driven society. More precisely, what we see is the perseverance and ultimate entrenchment of an *haut bourgeois* elite within middle-class ranks – an elite which is able plausibly to present itself as the representative of the whole of that expanded, yet geographically and occupationally fragmented, social grouping. The practical successes of this elite were considerable. For the first time the full moral reform agenda set out in the 1780s was unpacked into specialist organisations, each now generating a distinctive type of expertise. In ideological terms the impact of the moral reform approach to problems of social instability was equally impressive. As post-war activists shed the stigma of ‘disloyalty’, and started to steer their way between reactions of alarm at the spread of urban working-class disaffection and of distaste for ham-fisted official reaction to it, they played a part in relegitimising the social order which existing political and social elites could no longer afford to ignore. It is this reading of the era which springs most easily to mind when comparing its moral reform activities with those which had gone before, and, as far as it goes, it rings true.

What this first reading cannot register, of course, is the type of comparison which depends on knowing what came afterwards. And that type of comparison

¹⁶⁷ *British Society of Ladies . . . Sketch*, pp. 47–8; and see Kent, *Elizabeth Fry*, ch. 5, and Summers, ‘Philanthropy and the State’, pp. 136–8.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. M. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal, Culture, Law and Policy in England, 1830–1914*. (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 129–34.

forms the basis for a summing up which, if not alternative to, at least supplements the first by pointing to the contingent, often fragile, sometimes discontinuous triumphs of the post-war generation of reform activists. As the following chapter will spell out, the view from a generation on forces us to modify our assumptions about the strengths and weaknesses of 'pre-Victorian' reform movements in a variety of ways. 'Early Victorian' moral reform leaders registered this most clearly by the way in which they reconsidered where in society their most reliable support base lay. The London-dominated *haut bourgeois* associations of the Fowell Buxton era were soon to be challenged in the 1830s and 40s to become far more socially inclusive. More confusingly, debate was also to erupt about the fitness of the middle classes themselves to carry out a mission of moral redemption, especially when it came to deciding how far the values of the marketplace were to be allowed to extend into the private/domestic sphere. And because this debate necessarily had to take place in a widened political arena there could be no guarantee that volunteer influences and methods of operation built up under a more intimate and enclosed system of public decision-making would themselves survive unaltered. The dislike already shown by cross-class libertarian alliances of opponents of post-war attempts to tighten traditional standards of behavioural regulation, indeed, suggested a turbulent future awaiting self-appointed cultural elites. For all these reasons much now lay in the balance. Post-war moral reform movements had indeed made major gains – so much so that we may, by the early 1830s, talk about the emergence in English public life of an identifiably continuous moral reform tradition. How far that tradition would prove relevant to the articulation of the cultural concerns of those groups emerging into active national citizenship for the first time remained to be seen.

The post-war era of economic and cultural turmoil and of institutional experiment ended, as we have now seen, with a burst of decisive public action, which carried a variety of long-contested issues to settlement. Catholic Emancipation, the New Police, the Beer Act, parliamentary reform, the abolition of colonial slavery and the New Poor Law all aroused varying degrees of passion and resentment as they made their way towards parliamentary acceptance between 1829 and 1834. Yet each proved to be the basis of a lasting adjustment. And, cumulatively, the measures helped to bring about a reshaping of public life into a form which proved remarkably resilient against challenge. It is true, as noted in the conclusion to chapter 3 above, that this resilience could not be certified in advance. ‘Reactionaries’ dislodged from the old institutions of government, and ‘radicals’ excluded from the new, continued to question the legitimacy of the reform settlements. Yet, as it proved, the early Victorian middle-class public, on the whole, did not. The challenge, from their point of view, was to make the new system work.

State, society and moral reform in an age of free trade

How might the new system work to help or hinder the work of committed moral reformers? What adjustments of expectation would need to be made? A first major ‘political fact’ which unavoidably shaped expectations was the re-emergence of executive government as a committed participant in moral reform activity. This was perhaps made possible by a renewal of trust in law-makers and law-enforcers as a result of the reforms of 1832. It was certainly given powerful encouragement by the propertied as they anxiously sought ways of stabilising social relations in the years of mass unrest which recurrently racked industrial England between the late 1830s and mid-century. Above all, it represented a change of tactical approach to government by a key section of the governing ranks themselves.

The Whig governments of Grey and Melbourne (1830–41) and of Lord John Russell (1846–51) which found themselves facing the social and policing side-effects of the 1834 Poor Law, industrial depression, mass unemployment and

the aftermath of Irish famine were fully aware of the strains which the market-accepting 'managerial liberalism' of their Tory predecessors had placed on social cohesion. It was true that Whig leaders themselves had contributed to the situation by their support for poor law reform – but true also that they, more than their Peel-led Tory opponents, were prepared to use the powers of central government to monitor and regulate 'market failure' rather than hold to the pure doctrine that a rising free market tide would eventually solve all problems.¹ As one of the Whigs' favourite policy advisers expressed it in 1847,

The authority of Government, especially in a representative system, embodies the national will. There are certain objects too vast, or too complicated, or too important to be entrusted to voluntary associations . . . The relief of indigence is not confided solely to private charity; nor the sanitary improvement of our towns to benevolent associations; nor the defence of property and public order to voluntary combinations; can it then become any great statesman to abandon to voluntary charity alone, that improvement of the moral and intellectual condition of the people on which such vast consequences depend?²

A corollary to this approach was a willingness to employ professional experts to advise on policy and, increasingly, to implement it as well. All these shifts had direct implications for volunteer elites. It was more difficult for part-time enthusiasts to deal with expert-assisted royal commissions of inquiry than with the parliamentary select committees which had flourished in the years between 1815 and 1830.³ And the recruitment by governments of permanent, salaried, expert officials as inspectors of factories, prisons, public health and elementary schools, while a boost to the careers of strategically placed moral reform individuals, by no means strengthened the position of those who remained volunteers. In fact it tended to throw them into competition for the ear of government with alternative types of self-certified expert. These now included social statisticians and political economists.⁴

A further development working to undercut the position of existing moral reform organisations was the growing politicisation of the religious world which followed the constitutional adjustments of 1828–32. If pan-evangelical Protestantism had found itself increasingly at ease with secular authority in the

¹ For the characterisation of Peelite economic and social policy as 'managerial liberalism', see P. Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform. Whigs and Liberals, 1830–1852* (Oxford, 1990), p. 200. For general trends in reform-era socio-economic policy, see Thane, 'Government and Society in England & Wales', in *CSHB*, iii.13–25.

² James Kay-Shuttleworth, quoted in Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, p. 247.

³ D. Eastwood, 'Men, Morals and the Machinery of Social Legislation, 1790–1840', *Parliamentary History*, 13 (1994), p. 194.

⁴ For the emergence of social, economic and sanitary science see, *inter alia*, M. J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain* (Hassocks, 1975), ch. 8; F. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities. Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830* (1987), pp. 25–30, 41–2; E. J. Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science* (1996), ch. 3.

generation leading up to its greatest victory in 1833 – the abolition of slavery – it found itself thereafter very much more tested by trends and events. The core of the problem was the working out of a new, pluralist and denominationalised ecclesiastical order. This was needed to replace the old monopoly relationship between the National Church and the unreformed state which was slowly being abandoned by Whig and Tory governments alike during the 1830s and 40s. As those decades unfolded, High Church disgust at betrayal by the politicians, Dissenting Protestant attack on civil privileges retained by Churchmen, pan-Protestant revulsion at the prospect of equal state support for the ‘social work’ of all religious organisations, Roman Catholic not excepted – all these reactions took their toll on the prospects and fortunes of moral reform associations. Some past supporters were inclined to reorder their priorities to put directly evangelising activities first.⁵ Others spent their energies debating the degree to which it had become necessary to replace object-defined organisations with denomination-specific ones, while others yet again set about drafting rules to exclude from their discussions ‘all politics and peculiarities in religion’.⁶

To complicate the negotiation of a moral reform agenda still further, the rise of competitive evangelical denominationalism in the early Victorian period was eventually to help provoke a revolt against ‘puritanism’ within middle-class culture itself. While this revolt did not take effective collective shape until the 1850s, the signs of dissatisfaction were there for those who wished to look at least a decade earlier: it was in fact in the mid-1830s that secular-minded middle-class radicals had first set off in informal alliance with middle-class commercial interests to develop non-religious leisure opportunities for the disaffected urban labouring classes.⁷ In the 1820s or even 1830s this challenge could be dismissed by evangelicals as a nostalgic but misguided last stand on behalf of the uncouth cultural past. By the 1850s, with the challenge being issued by powerfully placed members of a new professional middle-class intelligentsia, it had become clear that the definition of moral progress was being contested yet again – not solely across the predictable battle-lines of class, but within the middle-class camp as well.

Behind this burst of political and ecclesiastical restructuring, we need little reminding, lay the social facts which had made the task so urgently necessary.

⁵ Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 50, 172–3.

⁶ The phrase is drawn from rule 2 of the BAPT as reported in *Preston Temperance Advocate*, Nov. 1835, p. 85. For an illuminating case study of the chronic tendency of the antislavery movement to fragment along ecclesiastical and theological fault-lines after 1833, see Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 94–6, 99–101, 115.

⁷ P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England. Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885* (1978), ch. 2; A. Delves, ‘Popular Recreation and Social Conflict in Derby, 1800–1850’, in E. and S. Yeo (eds.), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590–1914* (Brighton, 1981), pp. 108–15; H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780–c.1880* (1980), pp. 87ff.

Population growth and migration flows might have been a fraction lower than in the post-war decades. They were still high enough to cause continuing speculation and anxiety. More disconcerting still was the wretchedness and discontent generated by the particularly unstable phase of cyclical and structural economic adjustment which bottomed out in the early 1840s.⁸ From at least the time the New Poor Law was passed, in fact, it required no special social sensitivity to fear that future urban social relations would be dominated by ‘class conflict’. In this atmosphere it became a matter of increasing concern to moral reform elites to find ways to distance themselves from the more shaming aspects of the economic and political system into which their class had locked itself. How might moral reform causes best be pursued in such class-conscious times? Given the re-entry of the state into the field, the temptation was naturally to continue in specialised auxiliary support of state services until they made volunteer effort redundant or else generated inefficiencies or abuses giving voluntarists a renewed role. On a variety of fronts, however, we see a determination not just to adjust old priorities but to focus attention on new issues. The choice of these new issues reflected the class awareness of the post-Reform Act era.

On the labour discipline front the key struggles of the 1830s and 40s focused symbolically on the behaviour of a clearly identified segment of middle-class employers – factory owners. The opponents of unregulated mechanisation of large-scale industrial production were, by contrast, drawn from a wide variety of social classifications. Sections of most social ranks between landowner and labourer took part in the political mobilisations which ensured state intervention. It is striking to note, nonetheless, how the justifications for legal regulation as they emerged became translated from one moral language to another. Out of a situation fuelled by labour resentment at deskilling and casualised employment, disruption of family earning patterns and the terms of access to public relief, emerged a crusade symbolically focused on ‘victimisation’ – exploitation of those caught in the labour market on terms irreconcilable with strengthening middle-class ideals of gender and family moral order. In the words of the prospectus of William Allen’s Society for the Improvement of the Condition of Factory Children, the politically influential drew ‘opprobrium’ upon themselves and the property-owning classes in general by allowing ‘Infant Slavery’ to exist in ‘a Christian Land’.⁹ By a similar line of reasoning, the employment of women outside the limits of the domestic sphere was argued to be inherently demoralising to women and men alike. It thus became a social duty to create and patrol a protective environment for women of all classes, making specially

⁸ Cf. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, ch. 5, esp. pp. 143–4.

⁹ *Society for the Improvement of the Condition of Factory Children*. [Statement of Objects] (1833). The rhetoric of factory child labour as ‘slavery’ is ably analysed in H. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor. Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 4, esp. pp. 51, 82–3.

sympathetic efforts whenever necessary to restore to domestic influence those who had fallen victim to rough dealing.¹⁰ Every time ‘the problem’ was reformulated in these terms it drew attention to the possibility of uncovering a shared moral order – one which bound together groups otherwise to be found on opposing sides in their dealings with a freely contracting labour market. In so doing, it identified new tasks for volunteers to undertake, and new reasons for taking up some existing tasks.

Intensified commitment to the domestic ideology also helped to shape middle-class perceptions of the moral threat posed by market-driven patterns of consumption. Indeed, it was one of the sticking points in the early Victorian debate between ‘puritans’ and ‘anti-puritans’ mentioned above whether the rise of a domesticated working-class culture might of itself be a sufficient guarantee of moral reliability, regardless of its secularised focus. We drew attention in the previous chapter to the hesitant re-emergence of optimism (among temperance pioneers) about the capacity of working people to put desire for home comforts before the craving for drink. In the early Victorian period arguments along similar lines were used to justify a variety of experiments to moralise the urban working classes by stimulating their domestic affections. ‘Rational recreation’ was also a catch phrase of this era: ‘You have ta’en our young men out of the Public House, Sir: You maun provide something to do otherwise’, as an eager follower of the temperance leader, John Dunlop, warned.¹¹ Not everyone was as optimistic as this, however. The assumption that working people necessarily ‘refined’ their behaviour as they became accustomed to a regular, predictable surplus of income and leisure time was one which critics found it relatively easy to challenge. Given the notably unstable employment conditions of most of the period before the 1850s, examples in support of a ‘pessimist’ view were not difficult to locate.¹² In these circumstances old anxieties about the imprudent and short-sighted consumption choices of a commercially

¹⁰ For the gendered rhetoric of factory reform campaigners, see R. Gray, ‘The Languages of Factory Reform in Britain, c. 1830–1860’, in P. Joyce, (ed.), *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge, 1987), ch. 6; M. Valverde, “‘Giving the Female a Domestic Turn’: The Social, Legal and Moral Regulation of Women’s Work in British Cotton Mills, 1820–1850”, *Journal of Social History*, 21 (1987–8), pp. 619–34. The overflow of strengthening middle-class gender role assumptions into general middle-class perceptions of working-class life during the 1830s and 40s is discussed in Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 180ff., esp. p. 184. The overflow into professional medical discourse is examined in Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, pp. 25–30, 47–53.

¹¹ J. G. Dunlop (ed.), *The Dunlop Papers*, vol. 1: *Autobiography of John Dunlop* (1931), p. 89. See also Joseph Livesey, ‘Is Temperance Likely to Drop or Raise Wages?’, *Preston Temperance Advocate*, July 1834, pp. 49–50.

¹² For a first sign of ‘volunteer sector’ recognition of working-class mid-century cultural stabilisation, see *Mendicity Society. Report No. 16* (1853), p. 16. The economic underpinning of this stabilisation is discussed in J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850–1939* (1989), pp. 27, 30. The lack of regular leisure opportunities before the 1870s (in spite of the ‘Ten Hours’ Act of 1847) is stressed by H. Cunningham, ‘Leisure and Culture’, *CSHB*, ii.281–2.

over-stimulated labouring population continued to flourish. The symbolic targets mutated from decade to decade – fairs, racecourses and class-segregated beerhouses in the 1830s, the Sunday press and drink-related public entertainments in the 1840s, juvenile ‘low-life’ literature in the early 50s.¹³ In some cases these anxieties were once again (as on the work discipline side of ‘class relations’) fairly clearly related to middle-class attempts to make their class symbolically worthy of the moral leadership which, they were being told, they now exerted in national public life. Class ranks were to be purged of impure association and certain questions had to be posed as a result. What responsibility should honest commercial dealers feel when the ‘innocent’ or ‘weak’ fell victim to the temptations on offer in a free market society? What of the moral vulnerability of certain sub-groups within the widening but imprecisely defined catchment areas of middle-class membership itself – shop assistants, office clerks, schoolboys and female dependants of the increasingly sex-segregated suburbanised family? Early Victorian opinion-forming elites now accepted it as a truism that theirs was an age of irreversible material progress. This still failed to reassure all of them that moral progress was keeping pace.

Temperance and working-class self-help: moral reform projects of the 1830s

How, then, did existing moral reform elites come to terms with the opportunities and risks presented by ‘England reformed’? Which causes prospered, which withered, which were outflanked by the new and more urgent? While it is a platitude to label any period an age of transition, it is perhaps less so when the label is applied to the years immediately following the constitutional revolution of 1828–32. This was the moment at which a reformed parliament approved the overhaul of the poor law, the time during which Peel’s New Police and Crawford and Russell’s new prison inspectorate set standards of law enforcement and uniformity of treatment of offenders increasingly adopted across the entire country. Yet the operational effectiveness of these new institutional networks could not be assumed: it had to be put to the test. In fact, it took a good ten years to impose the New Poor Law, after a fashion. In the same years national crime statistics registered a rise to an all-time recorded per capita peak in 1842; and signs of resistance to the political order among labouring people (rural as well as urban) proclaimed themselves in an alarming variety of organised forms from general unionism to Chartism.¹⁴ There were various strategies available to morally anxious citizens under circumstances as fluid as these and it is possible

¹³ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society. A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900* (1988), pp. 287ff.

¹⁴ For New Poor Law implementation, see A. Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law* (1978). Crime statistics are surveyed and evaluated in Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp. 381–4.

to identify examples of at least three approaches developed over the 1830s and early 40s. Each, it will become clear, mirrored the preoccupations of a distinctive social catchment area in order to attract support.

The first approach to attract attention here is the most predictable – the urban middle-class philanthropic one. As the New Poor Law came gradually into effect it presented both opportunity and need for adjustment to existing volunteer charitable relief organisations. For most (not all) volunteer leaders, the tightening of conditions under which public relief was to be made available to the able-bodied was a move towards moral modernisation and was thus to be welcomed.¹⁵ Reliably administered state relief, as Mendicity Society leaders noted, would clear the way for voluntary charity to perform its ‘true role’ – that of relieving the certifiably deserving poor.¹⁶

The sense of optimism – the sense that, at last, the conditions had been set to reassure donors that their generosity would not be misdirected – was a mood which spread beyond Mendicity Society ranks. The 1830s were, in particular, the heyday of town relief funds in industrialising England. The obvious utility of these funds lay in the fact that they managed to promote cross-class social bonding in an era of class tension without the danger of imposing permanent burdens on ratepayers or conferring permanent settlement entitlements on those relieved. For these reasons such charities became much valued agencies among urban provincial middle-class elites – until the frequency and extent of cyclical bouts of industrial unemployment drove them and the Mendicity Society networks alike back to the state for further assistance in the late 1840s.¹⁷ On a related front, charity modernisers were heartened to note the way in which inquiry and moral surveillance standards were built into the new generation of evangelical urban mission societies which sprang into action to compete for market share in the new era of free-market denominationalised religion. It was more difficult to be pleased about the way in which this fragmentation of evangelical effort complicated attempts to impose uniformity of practice in the distribution of charitable resources. Yet, even here, the signs that a modernised definition of true charity had been adopted gave hope that ultimate uniformity might be achieved.¹⁸ All these developments encouraged optimism among established urban volunteer elites. Beyond the circles of well-established urban philanthropy, however, other groups were testing out a more diverse set of claims to qualify for public standing on grounds of moral worth. Most prominent of all

¹⁵ For the middle-class contribution, however, to the anti-poor law movement, see Himmelfarb, *Idea of Poverty*, ch. vii.

¹⁶ E.g., *Mendicity Society. Report No. 18* (1836), p. 13.

¹⁷ *Mendicity Society. Report No. 30* (1848), pp. 11–18, and *No. 31* (1849), p. 14; Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 204–5, 270, 302–3.

¹⁸ M. Roberts, ‘Head versus Heart? Voluntary Associations and Charity Organisation in England c. 1700–1850’, in H. Cunningham and J. Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform* (1998), pp. 81–2.

among these were the leaders of a second group of activists – the leaders of teetotal temperance.

The original, ‘anti-spirits’ form of temperance, we recall, had fitted without strain into the mould of class-ordered philanthropic reclamation so characteristic of the post-war era. Anti-spirits temperance cast the moral problem of drunkenness primarily in class terms (‘one of the chief causes of pauperism, disease, and crime in this kingdom’). It proposed moderate consumption rather than abstinence as its goal; and it limited its method of operation to ‘means calculated to prevent the formation of habits of intemperate drinking’ rather than attempt any more dramatic form of repression or resocialisation.¹⁹ For a time immediately following the coming of Reform this deference-based form worked rather well. Encouraged by the success of antislavery methods, the leaders of the London-co-ordinated British and Foreign Temperance Society set out in imitation to recruit ‘the whole of the sober, the respectable, the influential, and the Christian portion of the community’ to a campaign designed to raise public awareness of the social damage caused by ‘uneducated’ use of alcohol.²⁰ By the time that the report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Drunkenness was tabled by their ally and vice-president, J. S. Buckingham, in 1835, the London leaders could claim a national network of 557 societies ‘in connexion’ and a growing ability to convince urban licensing magistrates of the good policy of restricting the opening hours of ‘dram shops’.²¹

Behind the façade of apparent prosperity, however, middle-class temperance was already in trouble. Income fell short of centrally defined need. More worrying still, provincial temperance leaders of high local status were coming under pressure to concede far more rank and file participation in the running of the movement than they were prepared to allow.

The process of radicalisation had in fact been developing in urban pockets across the north of England and south-western Scotland for some time before 1835. The model society of ‘teetotal’ temperance pledged its seven founder-members to total abstinence from fermented liquor in Preston, Lancashire, in September 1832; its self-made small businessman founder, Joseph Livesey, traced his conversion to teetotalism to July 1831. Clearly, the heightened sense of anticipation of entry into public life and political citizenship played some part in shaping these acts of class solidarity. (In Preston precocious politicisation of the community had actually occurred in 1830 when the borough had overthrown ‘the Derby interest’ to install as its MP the radical, Henry Hunt.²²) It was not

¹⁹ *BFTS Report No. 1* (1832), p. 5. ²⁰ *BFTS Report No. 2* (1833), p. 22.

²¹ *BFTS Report No. 4* (1835), pp. 10, 13. For Buckingham’s campaign and its outcome, see *Report No. 3*, p. 10; R. Turner, *James Silk Buckingham 1786–1855* (1934), pp. 296–305; Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, pp. 106–8.

²² J. Livesey, *Autobiography* (National Temperance League, n.d.), pp. 63–4; Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 112–15, 119.

until the first reformed parliament had shown its full class colours, however, that a moral outflanking of the propertied provincial temperance leadership began to take place more widely.²³ Symbolically, Livesey's first 'missionary tour to the chief towns in Lancashire' was undertaken in 'race week' of 1833: one of the first signs of its success was the splitting of the temperance movement in Bolton by the establishment of a society not under the control of the vicar. Similar confrontations thereafter took place in the key centres of the existing northern temperance movement, Leeds and Bradford prominent among them.²⁴ The formal outcome of this series of schisms over teetotalism was the foundation in Manchester in 1835 of the British Association for the Promotion of Temperance (BAPT), an organisation with national aspirations and paper membership by 1836 of 47,178 spread over seventy towns and districts.²⁵ More significant than formal networks of organisation, however, were changes in cultural approach embodied in the local activities of the radicalised movement. While moderate, 'half-way' temperance endorsed behavioural standard-setting in order to cement ties of hierarchical social respect, teetotalism involved a process of cultural levelling. Commitment was measured by the degree of empathy shown with the plight of the intemperate, not just in the taking of a common pledge of abstinence to avoid giving temptation but also in a willingness to give mutual support in everyday living:

It is not the righteous but *sinner*s that need our help . . . If *visiting* was made a Christian duty, not merely the duty of a committee, but the duty of all . . . we should then have a full acquaintance with each other, learning to bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ.²⁶

Such a class-sensitive, anti-paternalistic movement was likely to tap northern enthusiasms far more readily than southern, urban rather than rural, self-made rather than conventionally educated, Dissenter rather than Churchman, and so it proved in practice. Northern missions to London made little immediate impact – Livesey's bell-ringing methods of drawing a crowd were more successful in attracting the attention of the metropolitan police than a full hall

²³ See, e.g., Livesey's disgust at the reception of Buckingham's select committee report by the House of Commons: *Preston Temperance Advocate*, Sept. 1834, p. 65.

²⁴ Livesey, *Autobiography*, pp. 66–7. For Leeds, see R. J. Morris, 'Organization and Aims of the Principal Secular Voluntary Organizations of the Leeds Middle Class, 1830–1851' (Oxford D.Phil., 1970), pp. 189–94; for Bradford, see T. Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society. Bradford, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 298–308; and see generally Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 130–2.

²⁵ For BAPT inaugural meeting, see *Preston Temperance Advocate*, Nov. 1835, pp. 84–5. Branch membership statistics (heavily centred on Cheshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and north Staffordshire) may be found in *ibid.*, Sept. 1836, p. 70.

²⁶ Quotation from Livesey, *Autobiography*, p. 83, repeating in the 1880s the lesson first learned and set out in the 1830s (e.g., *Moral Reformer*, 2 (1832), pp. 209–10) that pledge-taking was pointless until translated into domestic habit.

on his early visits to London in 1834–5 – and southern audiences in general remained difficult to subvert into communal intimacy.²⁷

The argument, nonetheless, that moral credibility required equal sacrifice from all social ranks was an argument inevitably powerful enough to make some impact on metropolitan philanthropic elites. The BFTS was challenged to match northern goals in 1835 and, on sidestepping the issue, was itself outflanked by a northern-assisted New British and Foreign Temperance Society in 1836. This ‘New’ society was then destabilised in its turn in May 1839 by an alliance of Scots, Americans and northern teetotallers operating to polarise an audience of 4,000 at ‘the most lengthened and tumultuous meeting that was ever held within the walls of Exeter Hall’. The decision endorsed at that meeting to abandon the gentility of (vestigial) aristocratic patronage and the convenience of access to the funds of ‘a number of rich quakers’ in favour of a pure commitment to the ‘long pledge’ of neither consuming nor offering fermented drinks was then repented at leisure.²⁸ With Quaker forbearance and funding, a National Temperance Society was pieced together from the fragments in 1842 on the basis of an ambiguous commitment ‘to abolish intemperance by promoting the universal disuse of intoxicating drinks’.²⁹ By the early 1840s, in fact, a certain degree of post-millennial bureaucratisation was starting to take place even in the northern temperance movement. (Lecturers’ salaries, costs of press advertising, repayments on loans taken out to build temperance meeting halls – all required steady support from a predictable income stream allocated between local and wider work by a pre-arranged set of rules.³⁰)

Whether these new trends marked a sign of maturity or of decadence for the temperance movement it remained for individual participants to decide. The fact was clear, nonetheless, that these participants were drawn from a far wider range of social, occupational and cultural backgrounds than earlier moral reform leaders had been able to mobilise. In the world of anticipation opened up by political reform the temperance movement acted both as a claim to citizenship and a training for it.

²⁷ Livesey, *Autobiography*, pp. 69–70; *Preston Temperance Advocate*, July 1834, p. 53; also Oct. 1835, pp. 75–6.

²⁸ For quotations and a report of the meeting, see *Journal of the New British and Foreign Temperance Society*, 1 (1839), pp. 169–84, 194–200, esp. pp. 183–4. The perspective of John Dunlop (the man ultimately called to chair the meeting) is documented in *Dunlop Papers*, i.130–3. For a full contextualisation of the issues in dispute, see Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 133–7.

²⁹ For a list of office-holders and objectives, see *National Temperance Society. Report No. 2* (1844), front cover. The key Quaker supporters were Richard Barrett, William Janson and George Alexander (foundation treasurer of the National Temperance Society and of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1839, and anti-apprenticeship activist, 1837–8). For the perceived continuing shortcomings of Quaker leadership in the society, see Dunlop, *Autobiography*, pp. 197, 319.

³⁰ For Livesey’s detailed critique of the deradicalisation of the northern temperance movement, see *British Temperance Advocate and Journal*, 2 (1840), p. 5. Cf. Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 176–8.

The same could hardly be said of a third cluster of associations also launched into action during the reform decade. These – the paternalist strand in voluntarist experiment – were unashamed attempts to reinforce hierarchy in the hope of averting any need to rethink the basis of citizenship. As in the case of temperance, a pre-history of pioneering activity by individuals can be glimpsed before 1828–34 but, as with temperance also, it was the contest for moral ascendancy which political adjustment precipitated, which gave mobilisation a wider and more urgent appeal. Broadly speaking, paternalist voluntarism was an Anglican, landowning riposte to the challenge of a more culturally plural, more market-driven society. Given that the majority of its potential recruits were already accustomed to participation in the traditional public institutions of parish and county government, paternalist voluntarism required a major institutional jolt to set it in motion.³¹ All this may be illustrated in more direct detail from the history of its most sustained experiment – the Labourers' Friend Society (LFS).

The post-war period saw a number of volunteer experiments fuelled by urban nostalgia for lost rural community, and an even greater number of experiments fuelled by rural ratepayer concern to wind back the cost of supporting an apparently rate-debauched class of landless rural poor. Yet it was not until the rural disturbances of 1830–1 in southern and eastern England (and the well-publicised discovery of attempts at union-based class solidarity among agricultural labourers which followed) that these experiments in the remoralisation of rural community attracted more general interest. The model which the LFS claimed as its chief inspiration was that of G. H. Law, bishop of Bath and Wells.³² As developed and applied by the society's followers the system encouraged landowners to take an interest in 'ameliorating the condition of the Labourer' by providing allotments on which labourers might (under advice and supervision) grow their own produce. In this way the objectives of the society might be promoted – an 'increase [in] the social and domestic comforts of the labouring poor', an 'improvement of their moral and religious character', and a strengthened disposition to remain 'independent of Parochial relief'. In this way, also, rural class relations might be stabilised: as the experience of 1830–1 was held to prove, only in those areas where labourers had a stake in property and good order could their respect for the rights of others be relied upon.³³

As was to be expected, the LFS plan was an approach making strong appeal to the Anglican parish clergy and 'Noblemen and Gentlemen' of the south of

³¹ D. Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (1979), p. 39. See also Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain*, pp. 51–2.

³² *Labourers' Friend Magazine*, 3 (1834), p. 161. The precise date of the foundation of the LFS remains obscure: it claimed to have begun work in 1830 but the earliest evidence of formal existence I have sighted comes from 1831–2.

³³ *Labourers' Friend Society [LFS] Facts and Illustrations*, i (1832), pp. xi, 247–51; *Report No. 2* (1833), pp. 7–8.

England. A little less predictably, it also attracted support among sections of the romantically influenced metropolitan and home counties commercial *haute bourgeoisie*. (The countryside, it became apparent, was to be envisioned as a place of refuge from class tension, not an arena for its specialised development.³⁴) This mixed support base is also reflected in the organisational pedigree of the LFS: while some of its founders linked the new society with urban community-renewal associations such as the District Visiting Society and the LDOS, others identified themselves as the lineal descendants of the more rural-communitarian Bettering Society of an earlier generation.³⁵ As the LFS extended its loosely organised advice and information network in the early 1830s, it might be said its potential to influence a wider public lay precisely in the straddling position which it occupied between rural and urban elites.

By the mid-1830s this potential came, in part, to be tapped. The focus of propertied concern swung away from the countryside and back to urban-industrial England and rural paternalists became increasingly self-confident suppliers of advice to urban moral reform leaders. One convert to the LFS reform blueprint was the rather surprising figure of J. S. Buckingham, temperance campaigner and the Radical MP for Sheffield. Buckingham's support for LFS goals was not unconditional: the allotment system, as Buckingham interpreted it, was not so much an end in itself as a first step in a wider campaign to persuade public authorities of the enlightened self-interest of counteracting the culture of the street and the public house by the rate-funded provision of facilities for 'rational recreation'.³⁶ Yet it was a first step which could be taken by any propertied individual or association. And, in a world of alarmingly impersonal, even antagonistic, class relationships, it did seem to offer one way of demonstrating that not all social relations were market-determined. For this reason LFS leaders found during the later 1830s a continuing source of support among urban employers and charitable elites.³⁷ Allotments, it was argued, helped to smooth the impact of wage and price fluctuations on living standards. They helped to reconcile the labouring poor to the curtailment of casual relief under the New Poor Law. Above all, it was claimed, they demonstrated that urban working-class culture could be domesticated, given a little environmental

³⁴ Of c. 870 subscribers listed in *LFS. Report No. 2* (1833), pp. 13ff., approximately 10 per cent are identifiable as parish clergy, another 10 per cent as titled landowners, and a lesser but significant proportion as retired army and navy officers.

³⁵ The chief link with the District Visiting Society was its (and LFS) foundation treasurer, the Evangelical banker, John Labouchere (for whom see note 125 below). Other figures link the LFS committee to the Vice Society, the SPCA and the Mendicity Society.

³⁶ *Labourers' Friend Magazine*, 3 (1834), pp. 161ff., esp. pp. 177–80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 (1835), p. 85. The subscription and donation income of LFS central operations peaked at £966 in 1835–6 before falling to c. £500 p.a. for the remaining years of its independent existence (to 1844).

assistance.³⁸ In the longer term, as it emerged, it was this final claim which helped to provide the LFS with a continuing role. While the vision of class relations repaired by contact with nature gradually faded in a more securely controlled countryside, the prospect of working-class culture refined by domestic comfort and good order remained to attract the interest of the charitable. It was under Lord Ashley's leadership that the LFS formally registered this shift of focus by merging its work with that of the newly founded Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes (SICLC). While the new society received solid and continuing patronage for its work of standard-setter to private landlords, it was clear that its shareholders no longer aspired to that role of direct community leadership which had driven the early LFS.³⁹

Unlike the temperance movement, therefore, the project of paternalist moral reform had not been able to stabilise itself as a community-building volunteer movement over the longer term. It is doubtful that its leaders ever wished systematically to transfer their support from traditional to volunteer-based institutions in any case. There is, however, one postscript to be added before leaving the LFS circle – one further set of volunteer experiments to be noted.

It was, as we have now seen, one of the key features of paternalist moral reform that it depended upon the summoning up of a sense of chivalry among its supporters. The strong were to demonstrate their moral credentials by taking a direct interest in the condition of the weak. They thus had a duty to act on behalf of the inarticulate and oppressed wherever they might be found. It was this class- and religion-tinged sense of chivalry which was to drive many an individual paternalist – Lord Ashley most notably of all – into the campaign for state regulation of child and female labour.⁴⁰ A parallel movement – one with direct links to LFS circles – was a movement to remove children from the tightening grip of the vagrancy laws: as with the LFS, so with the campaign for the 'suppression of juvenile vagrancy'. The object was to prove that environmentally assisted victims of a market-driven society might be rehabilitated if only a more systematic and personal concern were shown for their plight. The selection of urban street children and parish apprentices as the 'objects of compassion' was a decision made by class-aware members of a non-commercial,

³⁸ On the allotment system as a buffer against food price fluctuations, see *ibid.*, 9 (1839), p. 71; as 'the safety-valve of the new Poor Law' (though not all LFS members approved of the 1834 Act), see 6 (1836), 106–7; as a training in the domestication of (male) habit, 4 (1835), pp. 85–6.

³⁹ For the negotiations which led to the formation of the SICLC, see *ibid.*, 14 (1844), supplement, pp. 1–5; G. Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury 1801–1885* (1981), p. 250; Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, p. 162. For 'model housing' schemes during the 1840s, see Owen, *English Philanthropy*, pp. 374–7. For the increasing assimilation of the allotment system to 'official' sponsorship, see *Labourers' Friend Magazine*, 13 (1843), pp. 81ff., 107ff., 128ff.

⁴⁰ R. Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830–1860* (Cambridge, 1996), ch. 2. For a hesitant attempt made by William Allen and Samuel Hoare to launch a national petitioning association along 'moral reform' lines in 1832, see *Life of William Allen*, iii.35; *Society for the Improvement of the Condition of Factory Children* (1833).

land-connected 'traditional' elite on at least partly privilege-justifying grounds: Captain E. P. Brenton, the most active publicist of the project, was a retired naval officer, deeply distressed by his discovery of the condition of vagrant children in the Marylebone workhouse, and of the indifference of public authorities to their condition.⁴¹ Yet the appeal which Brenton's publicity aroused spread well beyond its status-defending paternalist origins. In terms of institutional pedigree, indeed, the Society for the Suppression of Juvenile Vagrancy (or Children's Friend Society as it was retitled in 1834) came into existence in 1830 as much through Brenton's ability to ignite a revolt within the management committee of the London Mendicity Society as through his ability to mobilise a new 'paternalist' set of supporters.⁴² While it is doubtful that all the secessionists from the Mendicity Society shared Brenton's passionate detestation of the 'Malthusian' laws of political economy (which the Mendicity Society had, after all, been founded to promote), they certainly agreed with him that the mere street-focused repression of mendicity was a pointless and self-defeating strategy.⁴³ They also supported him in putting their hopes for the future in a strategy which separated out vagrant children as a group peculiarly reclaimable by exposure to pastoral paternalist influence. It was, therefore, with the object of 'suppressing juvenile vagrancy, by affording agricultural and other employment to the children of the poor' that the new society was launched.⁴⁴ The fortunes of the Children's Friend Society, once formed, were, it must be admitted, distinctly mixed. Success during the early 1830s with children's agricultural schools gave way to disappointment and eventual scandal as the society developed its activities to include assisted migration to Cape Colony. The establishment, at last, of an official state prison for juveniles (Parkhurst) in 1838 also undercut the society's position. Brenton's death in 1839 then effectively put an end to its operations.⁴⁵ The role of chivalrous volunteer protector of the weak and reclaimable victim, however, was not abolished, as the exploration of developments in the 1840s will make plain.

Moral reform and the 'condition of England' question

By the early 1840s, as we have now seen, the first phase of Reform-assisted volunteer mobilisation had worked its way through to the point of exhaustion. 'Second-phase' initiatives, emerging in the course of this decade, tended to be

⁴¹ J. Brenton, *Memoir of Captain Edward Pelham Brenton* (1842), pp. 47–8, 174–5.

⁴² On the Mendicity Society split, see E. P. Brenton, *A Letter to the Committee of Management of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity* (1830), pp. 2–8; J. I. Burn, 'Strictures on the Children's Friend Society', *Labourers' Friend Magazine*, 11 (1841), pp. 1–4. For Brenton's allies, titled and untitled, male and female, see Brenton, *Memoir*, pp. 50, 172; *Children's Friend Society* [CFS], *Report No. 9* (1839), p. 6.

⁴³ Brenton, *Letter*, p. 28; Burn, 'Strictures', p. 1; and see note 129 below.

⁴⁴ Quotation from report of inaugural meeting in *The Times*, 19 Nov. 1830, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *CFS. Report No. 9* (1839), pp. 5–26.

more complicated expressions of moral concern. This was partly the result of a (selective) return of central state interest in promoting public order at a time of acknowledged extreme fluctuation in economic conditions. It was also partly the result of a mid-generational catch-up effect: the first decade of the reform era had produced anxiety, regrouping and experimental extensions of forces mobilised not only in moral reform circles but in political and ecclesiastical life as well. By the 1840s the waves of energy released from these multiple sources were starting to cut across each other in complex and often turbulent ways.

The implications of this general intensification of rancour in public life from the late 1830s to the early 1850s were implications not notably favourable to new experiments in voluntary social reform. It is clear to see, for example, how marginal a role was left for volunteer policing associations by the 1840s. Town charities, as we have noted, did rather better, but even they were struggling to justify their effectiveness in a decade when labour market conditions and state policy seemed programmed to produce more clients than could ever be rescued by volunteer methods. Meanwhile, the denominational fragmentation of urban mission work spilled over into outright confrontation when provoked (as in the field of elementary education) by the prospect of politically influenced state financial subsidy.⁴⁶ To complicate priorities even further, there was the unsettlement produced by the rise of radical middle-class demands for a further instalment of ‘aristocratic’ dislodgment – the campaign to repeal the Corn Laws. The Anti-Corn Law League, formed in 1839, drew a major source of its energy from its ability to present its case as one based on moral justice as well as the laws of political economy. It also drew a significant proportion of its personnel and methods of operation from the radical wing of the antislavery movement. Yet, for all that, such open politicisation of middle-class progressive elites worked overall to distort moral reform agendas, both by diverting the energies of potential supporters and by directing suspicion on middle-class voluntarism generally as a vehicle for the achievement of selfish, class-specific material goals.⁴⁷

In this climate openings for new initiatives in volunteer experiment proved relatively limited. Yet there were some revivals, some new departures. The most innovative of these tended to find their inspiration in the reports and series of social statistics which had been accumulating since the overhaul of public administration in the mid-1830s: statistics gave an unsectarian basis for action, as unsupported religious arguments no longer could. The most carefully planned

⁴⁶ D. Philips, ‘Associations for the Prosecution of Felons in England 1760–1860’, in D. Hay and F. Snyder (eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750–1850* (Oxford, 1989), ch. 3; Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 84–6.

⁴⁷ On the moral reform rhetoric of the Anti-Corn Law League, see Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 222, 409–10. For the partial carry-over of antislavery enthusiasms into Corn Law repeal, see Tyrell, *Joseph Sturge*, p. 94; and for diversion of temperance enthusiasm, Livesey, *Autobiography*, pp. 21–5.

of the new movements was undoubtedly the sanitary reform movement which emerged to tackle the issues of 'moral and physical' degradation unearthed by the statistical inquiries of the 1830s and most powerfully publicised by Edwin Chadwick in his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842). The Health of Towns Association around which supporters of this cause eventually gathered in 1844 was, from one perspective, a voluntary association more in name than in practice. It is indeed usually interpreted as a political front for the achievement of the goals of Chadwick and his ally of the moment, the displaced Whig minister, Lord Normanby.⁴⁸ There was, nonetheless, more than one way of interpreting the association's declared objective of 'diffusing among the people . . . information . . . as to the physical and moral evils' which resulted from defective public health regulation, and evidence that high political opportunism was only successful in harnessing volunteer support because a potential reservoir of support already existed. Key evidence here is provided by the veteran teetotal temperance leader, John Dunlop, who notes in his diaries a detailed series of self-initiated meetings with Chadwick and his ally Dr Southwood Smith from early 1843 onwards. At these meetings it was Dunlop who pressed the case for 'a formed society for promoting . . . sanitary measures, both as to forcing parliament into enactments and disseminating sanitary knowledge among the People'.⁴⁹ Once the association had been formed it was clear that Normanby, Chadwick and Southwood Smith extracted most advantage from the alliance: they gained access to a pre-existing network of provincial 'public opinion' arousal, giving in return the doubtful privilege of minority participation in a central committee of power-brokers composed chiefly of 'Lords, Dignified clergy . . . doctors or Engineers, wishing for employment'.⁵⁰ The executive majority, it emerged, had little interest in extending their efforts to include working-class self-management as Dunlop had hoped, and there was declining interest even in volunteer methods of operation once their professionally qualified leaders had confirmed their public standing by legislative recognition in the Public Health Act of 1848.⁵¹ And yet these middle-class professionals had felt the need to cast their objectives in terms of moral reclamation until that state recognition had been achieved.⁵²

⁴⁸ R. A. Lewis, *Edwin Chadwick and the Public Health Movement 1832–1854* (1952), pp. 106–15; Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, pp. 225–7, 258–63.

⁴⁹ Dunlop, *Autobiography*, p. 319. Cf. *Health of Towns Association. Abstract of Proceedings of the Public Meeting held at Exeter Hall, December 11, 1844*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Quotation from Dunlop, *Autobiography*, p. 319. For Dunlop's protests to Chadwick about his 'low profile' in the association, see *ibid.*, pp. 254, 262. For explanation of Chadwick's motives for keeping at arm's length from the association, see C. Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 249, n. 15. The eventual network of twelve provincial auxiliary associations is listed in *Health of Towns Association. Report* (1847), p. 7. For Dunlop's assistance with its construction, see *Autobiography*, pp. 247, 252.

⁵¹ Dunlop, *Autobiography*, p. 248, and see note 48 above.

⁵² Cf. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, pp. 25–42, esp. p. 26; Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, pp. 68–83.

Just as Chadwick's report had helped to galvanise support for the Health of Towns Association, so other releases of publicly certified information assisted the promoters of a range of other tasks of moral reclamation. The most notorious of all the 'condition of England' bluebooks of the 1840s was of course the report of the Royal Commission on Children's Employment in Mines. This report provided the fuel by which Lord Ashley propelled his 1842 mines bill onto the statute book.⁵³ The Act of 1842, however, while transferring to the state the duty of protecting the interests of one type of victim of the free labour market, left open the task of protection beyond the industrial workplace. Given the spread since the late 1820s of evangelical mission work among the urban poor, and the accumulation of 'social facts' gathered along the way, it is not surprising to find in the 1840s the sensitivities aroused by one campaign on behalf of betrayed innocents available for arousal on behalf of others. Given also the growth of middle-class domestic ideology over the same period, it might be said that the identification of sexually seduced girls as a source of particular shame to an enlightened society was all but inevitable.⁵⁴ There was, however, nothing inevitable about the forms which volunteer moral concern might take.

The first signs of collective anxiety about juvenile prostitution as a distinct social problem appear with the foundation in 1835 of the London Society for the Protection of Young Females and Prevention of Juvenile Prostitution. This society, effectively run from foundation by its secretary, James Beard Talbot, seems to have evolved in alliance with the pan-evangelical London City Mission, also founded in 1835. Its objective of brothel suppression, the prosecution of procurers and the rehabilitation of 'fallen' under-age girls certainly associate it with the more general evangelical campaigns against disorderly urban working-class culture which were mounted in the later 1830s.⁵⁵ Its chief support groups in fact overlapped, drawn as they were from the metropolitan clergy (Church and Dissenting), from City of London officials and businessmen, and from the evangelically aligned sections of West End society.⁵⁶ The setbacks which the

⁵³ 'I hear that no such sensation has been caused since the first disclosure of the horrors of the slave trade': Ashley on the public reception of the Children's Employment Commission report, quoted in G. Best, *Shaftesbury* (1964), p. 115. See also Yeo, *Contest*, pp. 82–3; and Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, pp. 206–7.

⁵⁴ For variant contemporary definitions of the terms 'seduction' and 'girlhood' see, e.g., M. Ryan, *Prostitution in London* (1839), pp. 119–31, 198; J. B. Talbot, *The Miseries of Prostitution* (1844), pp. 29–30. Broadly speaking, the 'at-risk' group targeted were usually urban working-class girls aged 11–15, some of whom were co-habiting with equally young boyfriends.

⁵⁵ For objects, see Ryan, *Prostitution*, p. 118; *London Society for the Protection of Young Females and Prevention of Juvenile Prostitution* [Young Females Protection Society]. *Report No. 4* (1839), p. 4. For links with the London City Mission, see Talbot, *Prostitution*, p. 23; Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 63–71.

⁵⁶ *Young Females Protection Society. Report No. 4*, pp. 9, 35–55, lists c. 900 subscribers between 1835 and 1839, with income rising from £42 to £778 over the same period. Subscribers were exclusively metropolitan and almost all male: they included Mrs Fry, and Capt. Brenton of the Children's Friend Society.

society encountered while attempting to ensure the exclusion of under-age girls from metropolitan brothels, however, led some of its supporters to widen their focus of concern to the commercialisation of prostitution recruitment practices in general. In 1843 these supporters organised at Exeter Hall (the headquarters of Evangelical voluntarism) a conference of London female penitentiary representatives. Out of that conference there emerged in 1844 yet another association – the Associate Institution for Improving and Enforcing the Laws for the Protection of Women.⁵⁷ Given its origins, and given the explicit list of law ‘improvements’ sought by the Exeter Hall conference, the Associate Institution seems at first sight little more than the Guardian Society of an earlier era recycled. The focus on the protection of betrayed youth might seem a slightly modernised approach to gaining public attention, but the programme of remedies sought – extensions of summary jurisdictional powers to allow magistrates to close down brothels, reductions in the standard of proof required for conviction of brothel-keepers and procurers – suggests a return to the community policing campaigns of the years at the end of the French war.⁵⁸

In practice, however, the institution’s own publications reveal a body with aspirations carrying it well beyond simple sin-reproving law enforcement. In the matter of brothel suppression, for example, the institution’s organisers were sufficiently aware of the drawbacks of being labelled ‘visionary’ moral fanatics to make it clear that it was the commercialisation of the business, not the act of prostitution, that was the object of intended criminalisation. There was, no doubt, a degree of ingenuousness in the making of this distinction, yet also an explicit recognition of the ‘right’ of a woman entering prostitution to make her own decisions as ‘a free and voluntary agent instead of being, as she now is, the dupe and slave’ of third parties with a vested interest in the trade.⁵⁹ The institution was also prepared to allow its publications to be used as a platform for the promotion of a wide range of strategies of preventive action. These included the encouragement of ‘the *mental* as well as *moral elevation*’ of ‘females in the humbler walks of society’, as well as training in non-predatory sexual behaviour for young males.⁶⁰

Suggestions as radical as these give evidence in turn of the openness of the Associate Institution’s recruiting policies – in particular its willingness to tolerate the support of a group of young Unitarian political and social progressives who were later to play a key role in mid-Victorian campaigns for sexual equality. (The most noteworthy names here are those of two rising young lawyers,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–14; Talbot, *Prostitution*, pp. 52, 57–8, 61–4.

⁵⁸ *Young Females Protection Society. Report No. 4*, p. 10; Talbot, *Prostitution*, pp. 61–4.

⁵⁹ *Associate Institution for Improving and Enforcing the Laws for the Protection of Women. Report No. 1* (1846), pp. 18–19. Cf. Talbot, *Prostitution*, p. 77, for the outline of a more orthodox evangelical policing approach.

⁶⁰ *The Female’s Friend. Under the Sanction of the Associate Institution* (1846), pp. 32–4, 70.

James Stansfeld and William Shaen.⁶¹) The majority membership, as the radicals ruefully admitted to each other, was more orthodox in its beliefs. Presided over by the paternalist Whig Evangelical, Lord Robert Grosvenor, and with the Tory Protestant MP Benjamin Bond Cabbell as its treasurer, the institution drew on the support of Churchmen (both ‘high’ and ‘low’, including half the bench of bishops), and some Dissenters. Its committee attracted support from a significant contingent of metropolitan clergy and of evangelical City businessmen as well as from lawyers and surgeons with an established interest in prostitution ‘management’.⁶²

It was, however, the willingness of the institution, when thwarted, to take to the methods of the extra-parliamentary pressure group which most clearly marked it out as an organisation in step with its times. In brief, the institution on formation had put its trust in a plan devised by its patrons to launch an ‘anti-seduction’ bill in the House of Lords. Yet when it became plain that the bishop of Exeter’s efforts had been obstructed past retrieval by government and general parliamentary indifference, the shift to a campaign of national, constituency-based ‘pressure from without’ came remarkably fast.⁶³ This was in part a tribute to the work of an antislavery-style travelling agent, and even more a tribute to the continuing vitality of provincial evangelical networks, both male and female. By mid-1846 the institution could claim twenty-five auxiliary societies extending from the port towns of the south and south-east through suburban London and the midlands to Chester, Manchester and Liverpool.⁶⁴ As the antislavery movement had found, so the women’s protection movement found that its best publicity and much of its organised support was to be found among women non-voters using social means to influence the tone of public debate. The high point of public visibility for the Associate Institution was reached in mid-1846 as the national network prepared to present its ‘Address to the Queen from the women of Great Britain and Ireland’. Here male pressure-group politics intervened in the shape of the Corn Law repeal crisis and the public campaign on behalf of female protection sank from view.⁶⁵

The Associate Institution itself survived the eclipse of 1846 to re-emerge in specialist form as a central clearing-house of legal information and a provider of expertise in the field of brothel prosecution and sexual assault. Its wider

⁶¹ K. Gleadle, *The Early Feminists. Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement, 1831–51* (1995), pp. 130–9, esp. p. 134. Cf. J. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 39–41.

⁶² *Associate Institution. Report No. 1*, pp. 3, 5. For Cabbell (also treasurer of the Lock Hospital), see *DNB*. Total subscriber membership of the institution plus auxiliary societies in 1846 was c. 1,000 in a male:female ratio of 8:1.

⁶³ *Female’s Friend*, pp. 17–18, 46; Talbot, *Prostitution*, pp. 64–8.

⁶⁴ *Associate Institution. Report No. 1*, p. 14; *Female’s Friend*, pp. 67–9.

⁶⁵ *Female’s Friend*, pp. 18–19, 71; *Associate Institution. Report No. 1*, p. 18. Cf. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 62–71.

attempts to promote a reappraisal of the moral basis of gender relations in an age of free market individualism were, however, for the moment laid aside.⁶⁶ The fact was that respectable middle- and upper-class reform constituencies in 'the age of the Chartist challenge' still derived considerably greater comfort from performing the class-justifying role of protectors of the weak and helpless than from presiding over a redistribution of citizen moral entitlements. The point is one which retains its force when we turn to consider volunteer attempts to regulate the non-sexual morals of the young.

We began the discussion of 1840s reform activism by noting the increasingly disruptive influence of religious sectarianism on voluntary efforts, most notably in education. It now becomes necessary to recognise and explain why, in one area of concern at least, a sense of the urgency of the task emerged so acute that not even mutual religious distrust could hold back co-operative volunteer effort. This area of concern was the provision of basic education for vagrant or street children. A previous specialist attempt to begin reclamation of juveniles convicted of street offences had, as we recall, stalled with the collapse of the Children's Friend Society in 1839. The statistical trends revealed by the publication of a standardised, more detailed series of criminal statistics from 1836 onwards were, nonetheless, more than adequate to keep the issue on the informal agenda of magistrates, local government officers and town mission managers, and informal experiments in preventive and remedial resocialisation were widespread.⁶⁷

In 1844, when a group of London Sunday school teachers finally made the attempt to co-ordinate one set of these volunteer initiatives in the Ragged School Union it was found that at least sixteen of these schools already existed in London alone. Most of them had close links with the pan-evangelical London City Mission. By 1852 there were 110 ragged schools spaced across urban England with a total enrolment of more than 13,000.⁶⁸ Lord Ashley, after contact with the Field Lane ragged school in London, made a point of setting aside his fixed preference for Church-exclusive missions to accept the presidency of the union, thus setting an example which Evangelical elites were quick to follow.⁶⁹ Use of the Bible apart, the Ragged School Union made no attempt to standardise the work of its locally based volunteers, but it is clear that the general appeal of the movement in the later 1840s may be traced to its ability to produce evidence of the tameability of the 'neglected'.

⁶⁶ For brief evidence of the institution's post-1846 activities, see H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (4 vols., 1861–2), iii.xxxi; L. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (2000), pp. 59–61. For assessment of long-term ideological impact, see Gleadle, *Early Feminists*, pp. 138–9, 174–7.

⁶⁷ S. Magarey, 'The Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Early 19th-Century England', *Labor History*, no. 34 (1978), pp. 16–17, 20–4; Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, pp. 103–5.

⁶⁸ *PP* 1852 (515), vii.307–8: evidence of William Locke, honorary secretary of Ragged School Union, to HC SC on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles.

⁶⁹ Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 251–2; Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, p. 166.

This triumph of taming was thrown into starkest relief when the triumph was obtained by middle-class educated women over unrespectable, street-educated boys, as happened most notably at the school begun by Mary Carpenter at Lewin's Mead, Bristol in 1846.⁷⁰ And it was the prestige generated by such transformation that (along with the low cost in comparison with prison or transportation alternatives) won reserves of credibility for child reclaimers when they moved to extend their goals from reclamation of street children to resocialisation of juveniles charged with or convicted of criminal offences. The 'Carpenter model', based as it was on Unitarian theological premises of innate capacity for mental and moral self-betterment, was a model placing more trust in methods of reclamation based on appeals to curiosity and mutual affection than orthodox, sin-aware evangelicals were prepared to concede.⁷¹ Yet the reformatory as an alternative to imprisonment for juveniles was, by the later 1840s, an institution whose moment had come. Police efficiency in patrolling the streets, combined with the phasing out of transportation as a sentencing option between 1846 and 1852, ensured that this was an area of social policy ripe for development. The details of negotiation which gained for reformatories eventual state recognition may be found elsewhere.⁷² It suffices to note for present purposes the following two points of comparison. First, this was a case in which, on certain conditions, the state actually transferred power from public to volunteer institutions. (The Youthful Offenders Act of 1854 required, to Mary Carpenter's distress, a short period of imprisonment to precede discharge to a reformatory but it left reformatories themselves entirely in volunteer hands, lightly inspected and substantially subsidised.) Second, the way in which this result was achieved pioneered yet another variant of volunteer associational action in an age of class mobilisation. In contrast to those who found they had to organise as 'outsiders' to place pressure on decision-makers 'within', sponsors of juvenile reformatories achieved their goals almost entirely by direct negotiation. Duty-driven paternalist parliamentarians (Ashley, C. B. Adderley), progressive experimental voluntarists (Carpenter, Sydney Turner of the Philanthropic Society and others) – all found official doors open if once they could agree among themselves. Tactics of recruitment and persuasion were tactics based on privately funded experiment followed by exchange of information within the professionally concerned peer group.⁷³ For this reason, formal structures of volunteer association – the Reformatory and Refuge Union (1855) and the

⁷⁰ J. Manton, *Mary Carpenter and the Children of the Streets* (1976), pp. 83–6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–7, 107–8, and see pp. 119, 130ff. for Carpenter's own compromises with her original principle when faced with adolescent rebellion against her essentially 'child-reclaiming' expectations. See also Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, p. 112.

⁷² S. Magarey, 'The Reclaimers. A Study of the Reformatory Movement in England and Wales, 1846–1893' (Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1975), ch. 3.

⁷³ I. Pinchbeck and M. Hewitt, *Children in English Society* (2 vols., 1973), ii.467–77. See also Magarey, 'The Reclaimers', ch. 3.

National Reformatory Union (1856) – emerged not as part of the mobilising process but as a result of its success.⁷⁴

Protestantism, pure literature and prohibition: moral reform at mid-century

If the daunting experience of charting and counteracting domestic ‘neglect’ had been the driving force behind volunteer association in the ‘condition of England’ years, then the change of tone which indicates the opening of a new phase at mid-century can best be identified as an aspect of patriotic sentiment reasserted. The era of supposedly removable inequalities which followed the disorders of the 1840s was, of course, an era still susceptible to panics of class-based moral suspicion. Yet the stabilisation of economic and political conditions which took place around 1850 seemed – as similar conditions had done in the 1820s – to widen the space available for moral experiment. Energies recently harnessed to confront domestic sectarian opponents were either allowed to dissipate or else directed outwards against perceived threats to the culture of the national community.

Several developments contributed to this change of focus. It helped that the greatest crisis of post-1832 middle-class confidence in national policy-making elites had been resolved as early as 1846 with the repeal of the Corn Laws. Pride in national political institutions had thereafter spread even more widely as a result of comparison between British stability and the continental lurch from revolution to reaction in the years 1848–52. (John Dunlop, the temperance leader, caught in Paris during Louis-Napoleon’s *coup d’état* in 1851, reflected the maturing views of many, even in British radical circles, that English liberties might be imperfect but at least they could be relied on.⁷⁵) The final refurbishment of a sense of national cultural mission was then carried out through a series of mobilisations – evangelical-led – in defence of the self-reliant traditions of English (and Scots) Protestantism. Early and confused mobilisations by Tory Churchmen begun in anger against the Irish Church policies of Sir Robert Peel in the mid-1840s spread and flourished under the encouragement of Russell’s Whig administration to reach a peak of pan-Protestant vehemence at the time of the ‘Papal aggression’ crisis of 1850–1. (A surge of post-Famine Irish migration to north-west and metropolitan parts of urban Britain ensured that the cultural ripple effect spread well beyond educated, middle-class voters.⁷⁶) All of these

⁷⁴ For objects and personnel of the two ‘Unions’, and exploration of the uneasy relations between them, see Magarey, ‘Reclaimers’, pp. 213ff.

⁷⁵ Dunlop, *Autobiography*, p. 348.

⁷⁶ Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 92–103, 179–99; J. Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829–1860* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 5; D. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford CA, 1992).

developments released energies potentially available for channelling to moral reform goals.

The reawakened sense of national cultural identity noted, it may be thought a paradox to go on to suggest that the identity itself – and the agenda of measures thought appropriate to preserve it – remained a matter of contest. Yet this was certainly the case: just as the development of a national railways system in the 1840s assisted both national economic integration and the specialist regional segmentation of the national economy, so different communities within the nation developed specialist perspectives on national moral reform priorities.

In the anti-deferential cultural communities of the industrial north the most spectacular volunteer efforts of the post-1848 years were harnessed to a revival and a refocusing of the temperance movement in a campaign for the legislative suppression of the drink trade. In several respects this initiative may be interpreted as a direct recalling and rechannelling of social energies already mobilised by the northern free trade, business-led Anti-Corn Law League, officially disbanded after victory in 1846. The device of a single-issue, politically focused movement designed to produce unity out of volunteer-generated confusion quite clearly attracted the founder-members of the United Kingdom Alliance (UKA), the pressure group organised in Manchester between July 1852 and June 1853 to ‘call forth and direct an enlightened Public Opinion to procure the Total and Immediate Legislative Suppression of the Traffic in all Intoxicating Liquors and Beverages’.⁷⁷

Several of the UKA’s founders had experienced the general feelings of strain felt by the teetotal movement as its members lost their initial sense of community-wide mission and moved towards more limited goals of self-help. (Nathaniel Card, the Quaker businessman who began the soundings from which the UKA emerged, was prompted into action by the personal discovery of the impact of liquor on Manchester slum culture.⁷⁸) A substantial number, too, had been prominent in the Anti-Corn Law League and were confident practitioners of its morally charged methods of electoral action, as the commitment to ‘call forth and direct an enlightened Public Opinion’ makes plain.⁷⁹ (Indeed, the UKA was to arouse considerable discomfort in some temperance circles precisely because its electoral focus and centralised, professional methods of operation marked a break from the dominant teetotal temperance tradition of anti-specialist inclusiveness.⁸⁰) Another inheritance of League activism was

⁷⁷ *United Kingdom Alliance [UKA]. Report of Provisional Committee* (Manchester, 1853), p. 2. See also p. 8 for UKA’s expressed hope that ‘it will never be compressed to a mere “Teetotal” effort’ (i.e., that all varieties of temperance commitment are to be harnessed to the agitation).

⁷⁸ Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 183, 195–6.

⁷⁹ For Richard Cobden’s endorsement of the UKA, see its *Report No. 1* (1854), p. 10; see also Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 163, 165, 201.

⁸⁰ Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 198–201; L. Shiman, *Crusade against Drink in Victorian England* (1988), pp. 76–9.

the strong identification of UKA founders with the cause of ecclesiastical free trade – a commitment to religious voluntarism fuelled by the convictions of first-generation voters drawn from the ranks of militant provincial Dissent.⁸¹

These points of ‘sectarian’ self-identification established, it is helpful to be aware also of the links of the prohibition movement with currents of moral reform anxiety spreading beyond the ‘Manchester model’ of self-reliant moral individualism. Given that the Manchester model was generally associated with the freedom to realise individual talent by competitive participation in a free market, there was from the start an apparently anomalous element of paternalism in the UKA’s crusade for state-enforced suppression of a trade in a product for which there was high (if regrettable) market demand. Indeed, it proved possible for that very reason to recruit to the UKA a small number of Anglican Tory paternalists of strongly market-curbing temperament.⁸²

The great majority of UKA founder-members were, however, anything but Tory paternalists and it became a matter of concern to them to justify the suppression of any kind of trade opportunity in a society dedicated (as they enthusiastically admitted) to the pursuit of ‘rational liberty’ and ‘the development of a progressive civilisation’.⁸³ Part of the justification might be made on grounds of overall national efficiency: one hundred million pounds a year might be saved if the cause of so much ‘crime, ignorance, pauperism, insanity, and disease’ were removed; electoral behaviour, too, would be transformed.⁸⁴ A full justification of the move to state compulsion, however, required two further steps – the stigmatisation of the drink trade itself as an illegitimate form of commerce, and the legitimisation of the state as the appropriate agency for the enforcement of liberty-challenging standards of ‘community good’.⁸⁵

It was on this latter point that UKA leaders drew encouragement from precedents at first sight culturally remote from their own world of market-driven individualism – precedents won by the Sunday observance movement. Yet a tenuous tradition of co-operation between southern Evangelical Churchmen, evangelical Scots and northern temperance Dissenters had in practice existed since the early 1840s. The habit of consultation had grown as part of campaigns by all these parties to protect the Sabbath from ever-expanding commercial threat. Heartened by the effect produced under the Metropolitan Police Act of

⁸¹ Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 154, 208. Of the UKA’s ‘founding fathers’, Nathaniel Card (founder-treasurer) was a Quaker, William Harvey (founder-chairman) and Samuel Pope (founder-secretary) Bible Christian and Baptist respectively: B. Harrison, *Dictionary of British Temperance Biography* (East Ardsley, Wakefield, W. Yorkshire, 1983), nos. 68, 286, 244.

⁸² E.g., Revd James Bardsley, UKA foundation committee member and factory movement activist: Harrison, *Dictionary of British Temperance Biography*, no. 23.

⁸³ *UKA Report No. 1* (1854), p. 2.

⁸⁴ ‘Address of the Executive Committee of the United Kingdom Alliance’, reprinted in *British Temperance Advocate*, 1 June 1853, p. 75.

⁸⁵ Cf. discussion in Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 187–94.

1839 – an Act which introduced a systematically enforced regime of restricted Sunday opening hours for public houses – provincial temperance associations played an active role in supporting calls for the extension of Sunday licensing restrictions across the country. (The restrictions were enforced for the first time in Lancashire as a whole in 1849 with noticeable effect on Sunday standards of public behaviour.⁸⁶) In this way provincial Dissent accustomed itself to approval of public regulation of ‘private’ market transactions. By the time the alcohol-free, Sunday-observing Great Exhibition opened in 1851, a resurgent Anglican LDOS and the Dissent-dominated northern temperance movement were both agreed on the symbolic significance of the event.

It was true that the LDOS put a more explicitly Old Testament gloss on such ‘signs of the times’: respect shown by a divinely favoured people for God’s purposes averted punishments otherwise liable to be incurred by the whole nation.⁸⁷ But Bible-conditioned evangelical thought-patterns permeated the social analysis of Nonconformists as well as Churchmen, northerners as well as southerners, even if the balance between invocation of religious and secular terms of concern might vary. It was in recognition of this ‘cultural fact’, presumably, that the founders of the UKA felt bound to conclude their first general appeal for support with a declaration of ‘earnest desire . . . that its basis may be firmly laid . . . on grounds as broad and catholic as Principle and Patriotism will admit of’ with ‘operations . . . conceived and conducted in a devoted spirit of the conscientious discharge of duty to God, and to Humanity’. In this way, it has been suggested, a vanguard of provincial Dissenters began to move from a ‘psychology of persecution’ to a ‘psychology of dominance’.⁸⁸ In this way, it might be added, the ‘geographically marginalised’ moved to establish their credentials of citizenship in a wider political framework – that of the United Kingdom. The distinction drawn between legitimate and illegitimate forms of trade (‘free trade in all good and useful things’) proved the claim of activists to moral leadership of a materially progressing market society. The willingness to rely on state power gave notice of their developing confidence in their ability to deploy and control it.

As events were to unfold, however, the immediate future was to prove a time of unexpected test for UKA self-confidence. The easy recruitment of a first support

⁸⁶ Dunlop, *Autobiography*, pp. 156, 313; *National Temperance Advocate*, 2 (1846), pp. 1–3; *LDOS Report No. 18* (1849), p. 28; *British Temperance Advocate*, 20 (1853), pp. 18–19. Summary tables of pub and beerhouse licensed opening hours may be found in Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 316–17. For police statistics of apprehensions for drunkenness in the 1840s, see D. Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in 19th-Century Britain* (1982), pp. 129 (London) and 163 (Manchester). For police evaluation of the effect of licensing-hour restriction on public order, see S. Inwood, ‘Policing London’s Morals: The Metropolitan Police and Popular Culture, 1829–1850’, *London Journal*, 15 (1990), pp. 129–31, 136.

⁸⁷ *LDOS Report No. 21* (1852), p. 22.

⁸⁸ *UKA. Report of Provisional Committee*, p. 8. Cf. Harrison, *Drink*, p. 181.

group of '1293 names . . . enrolled on the list of General Council, including 97 clergymen . . . of various denominations, a number of doctors of divinity, magistrates, medical men, and newspaper editors' certainly confirmed founders' hopes that religious and local government networks would form the backbone of a new movement.⁸⁹ The relatively cheerful acceptance of the UKA as a specialist legislative lobby group by the existing national temperance organisations also gave grounds for optimism.⁹⁰ In 1855, however, a dose of social reality struck: the London Sunday trading riots of that summer demonstrated in the most explicit way possible the political futility of exposing an 'unprepared' public to coercive schemes of moral reform by law-making (see pp. 188–9 of this chapter). Temperance veterans pointed to the need to reclaim the culture before imposing the law: the UKA itself was moved to adjust its immediate demand to the more 'democratic' goal of 'the Permissive Bill' – the right of ratepayers in individual communities to suppress the drink trade in their locality.⁹¹ This adjustment made, the Alliance found itself on a firmer footing, well placed to rise on a general tide of religion-assisted temperance enthusiasm as it developed from the mid-1860s. In the meantime, however, the confidence of northern Nonconformist elites in their ability to articulate national moral goals was being further challenged by the resurgence of more 'primitive' types of cultural self-assertion, both 'Anglican' and 'British'.

Protestantism was the national cultural inheritance of the English. It was also a cultural bond between English and Scots, the more so the more that evangelical forms of Protestantism became dominant in each national culture. A central feature of evangelical Protestantism being its claim to be the religion of the Book, it is not surprising to find active Protestants suffering at mid-century yet another bout of anxiety over the question of literacy – as well as a bout of anxiety focused on that other touchstone of cultural commitment, the observance of the Sabbath. For these reasons the space created by the mid-century dissipation of class tensions was always likely to give an opportunity to Anglican-led organisations such as the LDOS and the Vice Society, and so it proved.⁹² More compelling still, the fact that times were unambiguously prosperous meant that cultural anxieties were able to feed off accumulated commercial provocations as well.⁹³

⁸⁹ *UKA Report No. 1*, p. 15. UKA annual income exceeded £7,000 by 1856, dwarfing the income streams of existing peak temperance associations (which, to be fair to them, did not aspire to the degree of centrally directed resource control aimed for by the UKA): Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 23, 212–13.

⁹⁰ *UKA Report No. 1*, pp. 6–7. Cf., however, the tensions between UKA and existing temperance societies documented by Shiman, *Crusade*, pp. 75–80.

⁹¹ Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 183–6.

⁹² E.g., note the doubling of LDOS subscription and donation income from £613 (1848) to £1,221 (1849).

⁹³ See, e.g., *LDOS Report No. 20* (1851), pp. 24–6, on the arrival of Great Western Sunday excursion trains in Bath.

It was the sense of alarm fed by the remarkable expansion of mass market popular literature which was to lead, in January 1854, to the formation of a new volunteer grouping – the first since the 1820s to focus attention specifically on the moral costs and benefits of literacy. This was the Society for the Diffusion of Pure Literature among the People (Pure Literature Society). The urge to act had, according to the society's founders, been provoked by the revelations of urban missionaries, journalists and 1851 census interpreters – reports which cumulatively were taken to indicate yet another triumph of commercial marketing techniques over consumer self-control. As their most respected pre-publicist, Miss Mayne, summed up the anxiety,

The young people of both sexes in the families of the mechanic and the shopkeeper are now habituated to a course of reading in which felony, murder, and violation, forgery, adultery, and all other crimes are treated of as the common occurrences of life. The consequence is, that the minds of thousands are depraved by that very exercise which ought to improve them.⁹⁴

Miss Mayne relied for her evidence on the emergence of a trade in 'penny papers of a vitiating character' which her sources traced back, quite accurately, to the first half of the 1840s.⁹⁵ The emergence of a formed sense of threat from this material was, however, held back by other more pressing anxieties until taken up as a specific agenda item by mid-century defenders of Protestant national values.⁹⁶

The key organiser acting as link between the two causes was a young London barrister of Scots military family, John ('Rob Roy') MacGregor. MacGregor had begun his volunteer activities as a junior but energetic committee man with Lord Ashley's Ragged School Union, moving on thereafter to commit a significant part of his energies to the juvenile reformatory movement. More to our immediate point he was also chosen to become national secretary of the interdenominational association set up in mid-1851 to marshal public opinion against popery. (This was the Protestant Alliance, formally led by Ashley, or Lord Shaftesbury as he had become by then.⁹⁷) All of MacGregor's volunteer connections made some contribution to the launching of the new cause, but it was his Ragged School Union allies who gave most support in identifying popular literature as a focus of concern, and his Protestant Alliance network which gave

⁹⁴ [Miss Mayne], *The Perilous Nature of the Penny Periodical Press* (1852), p. 8.

⁹⁵ P. Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790–1860* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 84–5; V. Berridge, 'Popular Sunday Papers and Mid-Victorian Society', in G. Boyce *et al.* (eds.), *Newspaper History from the 17th Century to the Present Day* (1978), pp. 247–50, 263; D. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture. England 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 217, 251.

⁹⁶ For an example of the way in which explicit fears of foreign subversion of Protestant constitutional monarchy might build on residual anxiety about domestic class relations, see again Mayne, *Perilous Nature*, pp. 14–15.

⁹⁷ Wolfe, *Protestant Crusade*, pp. 159, 250–3.

the means, in May 1854, to turn a metropolitan initiative into a national one.⁹⁸ The foundation committee of the Pure Literature Society was, as a result, a list which added up to an informal roll-call of the principal Evangelical parish clergy of London, to which were added as many prominent London Dissenting and Scots clergy as could be recruited from the Protestant Alliance. A useful lay contingent of Protestant MPs (especially valued if county magistrates) and of evangelical City business leaders (especially useful if heads of publishing houses) was also recruited.⁹⁹

The object of the new society was not (as it might have been in tenser times) to suppress immoral literature by law. (This was the task, so far as immorality could be proved indecent, of a reclusive but revived Vice Society.¹⁰⁰) The object was to use commercial methods to 'overcome evil with good'. To this end the society set about the inspection of newsagents' shops and the establishment of a subsidised sale or return distribution network for supply to retailers of morally reliable substitutes for 'exciting, sceptical, and impure literature'. It also developed a home subscription scheme and a half-price supply service to working men's institutions.¹⁰¹ The system, once advertised, appears to have had wide appeal in later 1850s urban England, not least because the society had from the start defined its basic concern in terms of relations between age-groups rather than relations between classes. No doubt it had been the depravity of working-class youth which had first aroused alarm among city mission agents in the era of Reynolds' *Mysteries of London*. Yet we have seen that, by mid-century, the group identified as most vulnerable to market temptation is an amalgam of 'young people' drawn from 'the families of the mechanic and the shopkeeper' alike. (The spread, from the mid-1840s onwards, of volunteer efforts to provide and patrol the range of recreations open to metropolitan shop assistants gives further evidence of a 'pre-history' to this cross-class focus of concern.¹⁰²)

⁹⁸ Early records of the Pure Literature Society appear not to have survived, but the society's *Report for 1898* (1899) identifies the three leading founders as Lord Shaftesbury, MacGregor and George H. H. Oliphant-Ferguson. (The last was a barrister co-worker with MacGregor in the Ragged School Union's Shoeblocks Society: see his evidence to HC SC on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles, *PP* 1852 (515), vii.333.) For confirmation of the society's first formal existence, see MacGregor's diary entries for 21 and 27 Jan. 1854, cited in E. Hodder, *John MacGregor ('Rob Roy')* (1894), p. 181.

⁹⁹ For foundation committee list, see *The Record*, 4 May 1854, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Vice Society income fluctuated wildly after the 1820s, its activities chiefly financed from the invested legacies of deceased supporters. The evidence of subscription and donation income recorded in the society's account with its banker, however, reveals a healthy level of support at mid-century (e.g., £450 in 1850) in contrast to depressed levels in the early 1840s and mid-1850s (£220–240). (My thanks to Hoare's Bank, Fleet Street, London, for permission to sight their ledgers.)

¹⁰¹ *Pure Literature Society. Report for 1875*, pp. 4–9; *Report for 1886*, pp. 15–19; and cf. Berridge, 'Popular Sunday Papers', p. 255.

¹⁰² Ellis, 'The Evangelicals and the Sunday Question', pp. 189–95; C. Binfield, *George Williams and the YMCA* (1973), pp. 155–8, 171. Cf. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 259–60.

Overall, then, associations such as the Pure Literature Society represented an approach to national moral regeneration less system-challenging, more rank-respecting, than that adopted by the Lancashire-led UKA. The London-based society relied more than a northern society would have done on professional and service-sector elites for its leadership. Yet both types of society registered related tremors of unease amplified by the spread of a market-driven prosperity: each cultural world, in its own way, experimented with methods of avoiding moral blame for the ‘excesses’ of a system in which each was implicated.

Looking back over the post-1832 period as a whole we may now sum up the logic of volunteer activity as follows. Moral reformers of the generation following 1832 found themselves actors in a ‘public sphere’ significantly reshaped. In one direction volunteer activities of long standing had become redundant: the state, advised by professionals, had committed itself to moral modernisation in the fields of police, prison and poor law administration in a way which drove volunteer efforts to the margins. Any stimulus to further volunteer intervention in these areas was, broadly speaking, restricted to cases in which uniformity of enforcement of state policy came into conflict with evolving middle-class assumptions about the degree of moral autonomy possessed by women, children and adolescents. In other directions, however, moral reform voluntarism was able to renew its appeal, principally by becoming a vehicle for the expression of competitive class-based assertions of fitness for public leadership. Given that the new politics of class mobilisation necessarily drew into public debate groups which had previously been excluded or too weakly motivated to participate, this development also meant a widening of the social and cultural range of origins of recruits to moral reform causes. The extent and pattern of this recruitment is explored further in the section which now follows.

Leaders: the age of Livesey and Shaftesbury

‘Thank God that I should have lived to witness a day in which England is willing to give twenty millions sterling for the abolition of slavery.’ Thus Wilberforce is reported to have exclaimed as he lay on his death-bed (July 1833).¹⁰³ Wilberforce was fortunate in the timing of his exit in more than one sense: he had lived to the end of an era in public life, and not beyond it. The changes just related which reshaped the arena of public debate made times stressful for those whose lives straddled the two eras. Class tensions, denominational politics and the professionalisation of certain aspects of public administration all had their effect on the careers of those who had gained a reputation in earlier times.

Among the more prominent victims of the new age we must undoubtedly list Thomas Fowell Buxton – indeed, to a lesser extent, the whole Buxton–Gurney

¹⁰³ Buxton, *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*, p. 343.

circle described in chapter 3. Buxton's precarious position as a Whig-leaning Churchman leading an increasingly Dissent-driven antislavery movement has already been recorded there. By the end of Sturge's campaign to cut short the apprenticeship provisions of the 1833 Abolition Act Buxton himself was moved to make the private admission that 'Sturge and that party, whom we thought all in the wrong, are proved to be all in the right'. Buxton had misjudged the balance of forces in the new era of electoral extension. His impeccably well-patronised and strategically compelling plans to suppress the slave trade at source, when put into execution through the African Civilisation Society's River Niger expedition of 1841, proved a disaster from which his anti-Establishment rivals drew yet further strength. His influence as an unrepentant pan-evangelical in an age of emerging domestic sectarian politics on the other hand, made him suspect to an increasing number of Churchmen over the final years of his life (he died in 1845).¹⁰⁴ His Quaker brother-in-law J. J. Gurney outlived him long enough to experience the unravelling of yet another strand of cultural certainty: in April 1845, after much self-searching, he found 'the times [so] portentous' as to compel him to throw his support behind the protest campaign aroused by Peel's extension of government subsidy for the training of the Irish Catholic clergy (the 'Maynooth grant'), this in spite of life-long commitment to Whig principles of religious toleration.¹⁰⁵

In contrast to these cases of career fracture, the careers of anti-Establishment challengers of old-style moral reform seem, at first sight, to suggest a more natural fit between personal and public culture. Joseph Sturge, that thorn in the side of Buxton-era veterans, could certainly claim part of his authority from his ability to cast himself in a role which newly enfranchised voters of urban provincial electorates recognised as speaking in their voice and on their behalf. And Sturge had Dissenter allies who, by the later 1830s, appeared to be on the point of tapping even greater cultural energies. (Edward Miall, emerging provincial leader of an increasingly militant campaign against remaining Church civil privileges, was one of these allies.) The immediate triumph of organised moral indignation which had swept all before it in 1837–8 was, however, not to be repeated. Sturge's hopes of a moralised working class recruited culturally to tee-total temperance and politically to the support of a radical free-trade provincial middle class proved, in the class-conscious early 1840s, no match for Chartism. Sturge's unwillingness ever to compromise on 'matters of principle' also lost him credibility among his middle-class allies, a point underlined by the disastrous split which his candidature caused in the anti-Tory vote at the Birmingham

¹⁰⁴ Quotation from *ibid.*, p. 441. For the African Civilisation Society, see Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge*, p. 139. For Buxton's key role as foundation treasurer in the pan-evangelical London City Mission, see Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 50–1.

¹⁰⁵ Braithwaite, *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney*, ii.433, 439–40.

by-election of 1844.¹⁰⁶ His efforts thereafter to promote moral transformation contracted visibly towards the millennial but marginalised cause of world peace on the one hand, and a practical but restricted preoccupation with Birmingham local government on the other. His final years were largely focused on family, on the provision of recreation facilities for the Birmingham working classes, and (in imitation of his first father-in-law, James Cropper) on the development of a family-style juvenile reformatory – one of the first to be certified under the Act of 1854.¹⁰⁷

If Sturge's efforts, too, had ultimately been thwarted, they did at least indicate a man continuing to look on moral reform as an aspect of political and social progress, however delayed progressive goals might be in achievement. This sense of progress, loosely identifiable as a sense of the benefits to be gained from promoting equality of opportunity for the exercise of abilities in each individual citizen, was in practice a powerful energiser of moral reform effort across a broad range of first-generation 1830s recruits to moral reform causes.¹⁰⁸ It acted especially strongly among those of provincial self-made origin, among whom the Preston temperance activist Joseph Livesey (1794–1884) was the archetype.

Livesey, the orphaned son of a Lancashire small businessman, reared from the age of seven by a poverty-stricken grandfather, was (as he delighted in relating) a youth who had inherited little else but the experience of deprivation and the realisation of the need to be resourceful. Yet, as he rationalised it, such deprivation was in its way a form of career advantage:

I never regretted that poverty was my early lot, and that I was left to make my own way in the world. It was here, I believe, I learned to feel for the poor, to acquire the first lessons of humanity, and to cultivate my own energies as the best means (in my case the only means) of self-advancement.¹⁰⁹

Livesey went on to conceive of the nature of the moral reform task, therefore, not as an act performed by social superiors as a reparation for their past neglect of inferiors, but as an act of encouragement to people like (or potentially like) himself in the hope of their forming networks of mutual support. These networks he had, as an adolescent, found for himself in the chapel congregations of the less hierarchical forms of evangelical religion.¹¹⁰ Once having insulated himself

¹⁰⁶ Tyrrell, *Sturge*, pp. 67–71, 96–9, 119–31, 148. The Tory MP elected as a result of the anti-Tory split of 1844 was in fact Richard Spooner, brother-in-law of William Wilberforce and, once elected, official parliamentary agent of the Associate Institution.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, chs. 13, 15, esp. pp. 185–7, and see p. 199.

¹⁰⁸ Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 390, 408–9. ¹⁰⁹ Livesey, *Autobiography*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Livesey traced the first stage of his rescue from 'mental darkness and vice' to his reception into membership of a Baptist chapel at the age of seventeen, a rescue confirmed by his marriage to a fellow Baptist at the age of twenty-one: *ibid.*, pp. 10–13. For his retrospective disgust at the culture of his pre-Baptist associates, see pp. 7–9.

from the demoralising effects of the undisciplined, drink-related culture of his youth, Livesey proved a generally adept businessman. A first career in the post-war retail, then wholesale, cheese trade had generated sufficient capital by the early 1830s to support a family of nine surviving children as well as to supply the resources for the founding of a family-run newspaper publishing business.¹¹¹

As family prosperity established itself, so did resources for discretionary spending and the opportunity to gain recognition within the local community, and it was at this point that the moral egalitarianism of Livesey's beliefs became most emblematic of 'first-generation' provincial activism in general. Having risen from the unpropertied and unlettered, Livesey was never prepared to concede that others might be incapable of doing likewise. A major contributor to the Preston town relief funds of the 1830s and early 40s, and the major obstructor of the building of a New Poor Law workhouse in the town, Livesey refused, nonetheless, to turn himself into a paternalist along the lines of the former landowning patrons of pre-radicalised Preston. His task as he continued to see it was to agitate publicly to relieve the poor of class-imposed structural burdens (such as the Corn Laws and a bureaucratised poor law) while at the same time encouraging them to realise that the resources for self-respect lay within their own control, given a well-ordered domestic life and prudent spending priorities. Abstention from alcohol was, of course, the key to prudent living but the reproach of those who failed to discipline themselves was never to be allowed to override communally generated principles of Christian charity:

Often have I caused a little unpleasantness at home by introducing persons – strangers, who were in distress . . . I have still all the feelings of a poor man; I prefer the company of poor people; and if misfortune should render it necessary, I think I could fall back into that humble sphere of living with which I commenced without feeling the shock as most people would do. I have tried two or three times to be a gentleman; that is, to leave off work and to enjoy myself, but it never answered.¹¹²

It will be noted by this point that Livesey, while a successful founder of a family business, was a man whose occupation as printer and publisher allowed him more than many to combine the task of earning a living with a 'career' in moral reform. In this respect he found himself at one with a market-ordered society in a way which not all morally aroused provincials were able to achieve.¹¹³ Indeed, the confidence of provincially based radicals that they represented the forces of inevitable improvement had usually to be balanced against the experience of market fickleness, even adversity, the result being a commitment to moral

¹¹¹ For Livesey's early business career (with due acknowledgement of his wife's key role), see *Autobiography*, pp. 14–18, 44. For the later development of the family publishing business (heavily dependent on moral reform causes for its profitability), see pp. 45–7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹³ For the notably 'low profile' of manufacturers in 1830s voluntary associations, and some reasons for it, see Morris, *Class, Sect, and Party*, pp. 219–24.

reform as often persevered in to preserve self-respect as to propagate it. We may identify two cases of this type of status-stabilising activism in the careers of Livesey's more precariously placed temperance associates, John Dunlop (1789–1868) and James Silk Buckingham (1786–1855).

Dunlop and Buckingham were both men of respectable family of gentlemanly status (the one from Greenock outside Glasgow, the other from Cornwall). Both underwent a form of evangelical conversion in youth or early adulthood. Both developed career paths which ensured their ultimate status as Londoners of significant public reputation. Beyond these points the comparison diverges. Dunlop, like Fowell Buxton, found himself for much of his life in an occupation which brought in a living at the cost of emotional and spiritual fulfilment. (He practised law while acting as secretary to the Greenock Chamber of Commerce, directed by his father.) Buckingham, after experience at sea from the age of ten, worked his way through a series of self-taught occupations to find fulfilment in the role of radical journalist and professional lecturer: his career reached its high point in 1832 on his election as Radical MP for Sheffield in the first reformed parliament. In neither case, however, was the career path followed a guarantee of continuing achievement.

Dunlop, racked by bouts of disgust and depression about the state of his industrialising community, turned first to Chalmers-inspired district visiting and then in 1830 to temperance, only to find local community leaders unsympathetic and business clients hostile. In 1838, after coming into a family inheritance, he decided to cut his losses and to move south. Once in London, he found his reputation as a competent, unsectarian organiser of non-class-specific social origins a useful entry qualification to progressive metropolitan circles. By the 1840s a member of the Statistical Society, a welcome go-between in the splintered world of post-gentlemanly temperance associations, a confidant of Chadwick and of Southwood Smith, Dunlop seemed to have a second career made. Yet still he worried, and with some reason. His income proved precarious – his father was found to be all but bankrupt when he died in 1841 – and his own inability to launch his sons in careers appropriate to their station threw him into 'deep melancholy'. As setbacks multiplied in the later 1840s he was moved on reading of the sufferings of the early Christians to compare his lot with theirs – a 'small and trivial' set of trials not precluding ultimate triumph but a 'martyrdom' nonetheless.¹¹⁴

Buckingham, by contrast, was less given to introspection, let alone self-criticism. (Dunlop, after experiencing his platform style in 1841, noted 'an unfortunate thread of self-applause' for all the 'cosmopolitan liberality of mind' displayed.) Yet Buckingham, too, lived precariously (and much less prudently

¹¹⁴ Dunlop, *Autobiography*, p. 287. For Dunlop's early career and emotional crises, see pp. 15–17, 50–7. For the decision to move to London, see pp. 110–11.

than Dunlop). His schemes of environmental remedy for moral degradation (see p. 154 above) grew ever more elaborate as his audience fragmented and his resources dwindled. After his financial embarrassments had driven him to give up his seat in parliament in 1837 his remaining career revolved around a series of never quite successful enough lecture tours and club-forming ventures. These enterprises were subsidised from 1851 onwards by a £200 annual grant from the civil list. He died in 1855, his autobiography in four volumes left all too appropriately only half published.¹¹⁵

For a final type of provincial progressivist commitment to moral reform we must now extend our interest to activity with careers moulded not so much by market experience unmediated as by aspiration to professional status. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that a pre-1832 generation of moral reformers had often played a significant part in the professionalisation of a variety of service-based occupations ranging from clergy-supervised district visiting to prison management. This era of relatively easy transition was not to last. Broadly speaking, the activists who came to the fore in the post-Reform decades found themselves confronted by a society displaying more polarised attitudes towards claims of professional status than had, up to that point, been the case. On the one hand, the argument ran, such claims amounted to illegitimate demands for recognition of monopoly, the more so if associated with state employment. (Here the charge of aristocratic and/or Anglican parasitism might be added to indicate even greater distrust.) On the other hand, such claims could be accepted as doing no more than register the reality of intellectual and practical progress achieved. On balance, it was the negative evaluation of professional claims which tended to prevail in the culturally exposed world of moral reform. The area of prison management aside, it is difficult to discern the state as a promoter of new moral expertise in the new era. Even those who claimed to mix moral concern with more hard-edged sanitary, engineering or economic skills ran the risk of mid-career extinguishment, as the easing out of Edwin Chadwick from his position at the Board of Health emphasised as late as 1854. Yet the aspiration to professional status over these same years seems clearly to have intensified among males practising knowledge-based skills, if the spate of professional organisations founded over the period is any indicator.¹¹⁶

As was the case with commercial careers, so with professional or aspirant professional. Some were more compatible with volunteer commitment than

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171 (Dunlop on Buckingham's platform style). For Buckingham's career, see Turner, *Buckingham*.

¹¹⁶ For Chadwick's turbulent career, see Brundage, *England's Prussian Minister*, pp. 91, 120, and ch. 8. For a rare example of a mid-century 'moral reform career' financed by the state, see *DNB* entry for Revd Sydney Turner (1814–79), first inspector of juvenile reformatories (1857). The pattern of formation of professional organisations up to 1850 is set out in P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700–1850* (1995), pp. 181–4.

others. It is in fact from families of schoolteachers that we find it easiest to draw examples of emerging moral reform professionals. F. R. Lees (1815–97) and Mary Carpenter (1807–77), our chief examples here, might both be said, as eldest children of schoolteachers, to have inherited a family tradition.¹¹⁷

The benefits to be gained from such a tradition were various. Schoolteaching as a family business gave younger family members (male and female) some training in personnel and resource management. It also helped to nurture a willingness to form opinions on public issues. These opinions, given the precarious status of teachers in a society more respectful of inheritance and wealth than of abstract knowledge, were unlikely to be conventional. Lees' father had been radicalised sufficiently by his personal experience of landlords to propel himself into the position of secretary to the Leeds Political Union in its 1832 heyday. Dr Lant Carpenter, Mary's father, was also a radical, a leader of the antislavery cause in Bristol, and a Unitarian minister of more than local reputation. In both cases the children of such family environments emerged into adulthood with a strong sense of mission. It was a sense driven by belief in the existence of a transcendent source of moral authority yet limited in its willingness to accept (as orthodox evangelicals did) that sin and suffering were a necessary part of the divine plan.¹¹⁸

The young F. R. Lees first emerged to play a role on a public stage in his own right when, in 1836, he seized the opportunity presented to deliver, at short notice, the pivotal speech in the legendary debate which secured the Leeds Temperance Society for the forces of 'democracy' and teetotalism. From this time onwards he was quick to make his mark as the intellectual of the growing movement, a move motivated in part by his hope to escape from the frustrations generated by a disliked legal career and a miscarried family bequest. By 1838 he was earning a living as full-time secretary and journal editor to the BAPT. The 1840s saw his emergence as a professional temperance lecturer and promoter of Christian Chartist schemes of communal self-help, the Leeds Co-Operative Society among them. By the 1850s his public-speaking talents were in demand on both sides of the Atlantic and in 1854 he became a salaried travelling lecturer for the UKA, a position held until the embarrassment of a libel case (1857) drove him into temporary (but temperance-funded) retirement. At each stage of his career he had shown his intellectual value to the cause by formulating and defending the case for a particular course of action in coherent, published form. (His most widely noticed publication was his three-hundred-page UKA Prize Essay of 1853 in defence of the 'anomalous' proposition that the state was entitled and duty-bound to prohibit trade in liquor.) Lees, it must be recorded,

¹¹⁷ Cf. D. Gorham, 'Victorian Reform as a Family Business', in A. Wohl (ed.), *The Victorian Family* (New York, 1978), ch. 6; Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, pp. 186–8.

¹¹⁸ F. Lees, *Dr Frederic Richard Lees* (1904), pp. 2–3, 12, 25–6; Manton, *Mary Carpenter and the Children of the Streets*, pp. 26, 41, 62.

never quite achieved the secure recognition of his public relations talents to which he aspired, yet his supporters valued his skills highly enough to provide him with a subsidy sufficient to allow the professionalisation of his occupation, the misgivings of dedicated amateurs (Livesey) and the outflanking movements of 'purely entertainment-driven' rivals (his libel-case antagonist, J. B. Gough) notwithstanding.¹¹⁹

In Mary Carpenter's case the development of a professional career was further complicated by the fact that she was a woman – a woman emerging into public view in an age of increasingly formal accreditation of professional qualifications and division of gender roles. The encouragement which her radical father gave to her early work of district visiting in dockside Bristol, therefore, was an encouragement couched at least as much in terms of fulfilment of domestic as of public role, and even this support was removed by her father's death in 1840: for some years to follow, the need to earn a living from schoolteaching crowded out alternative goals. It was, nonetheless, the unexpected winning of freedom to act unsupervised by male authority which, in the 1840s, allowed the development (with some subsidy from the widowed Lady Byron) of a new form of contact with street children: the ragged school. Paradoxically, it was the direct experience of success achieved at this 'domestic' level of inter-class contact that fired Mary Carpenter to generalise about her activities, thus attracting the respectful notice of male officialdom. By 1851 the publication of her book on *Reformatory Schools for the Children of the Perishing and Dangerous Classes* effectively certified her claims to expertise in the field of 'juvenile delinquency': from this flowed invitations to address parliamentary committees, participation in national conferences of opinion-forming, professionally qualified males, and patronage sufficient to launch her in her subsequent career as superintendent of Kingswood (1852) and Red Lodge (1854) reformatories. It needs still to be stressed, however, how narrow was the ledge along which she had advanced. The sense of mission itself had produced painful emotions of gendered self-doubt: 'I used to think I had a more masculine than a feminine nature, but I feel more and more that my essence is womanly to a peculiar degree . . . [I]t is a great pain to me to be brought into any degree of notoriety, but yet I must speak.'¹²⁰ Even so, she declined any public address to the assembled experts in juvenile delinquency whose conference she had effectively organised in Birmingham in 1851. And the disciplinary disasters of her 'family-model' regime at the Kingswood reformatory in 1854 could only be resolved by restricting her role

¹¹⁹ Lees, *F. R. Lees*, pp. 28, 31, 46–7, 78–9, 87–97. For Livesey's objections to professionalisation of temperance work, see note 30 above. For a temperance 'insider' critique of Gough's methods of working an audience ('not dignified . . . but effective'), see Dunlop, *Autobiography*, p. 360.

¹²⁰ Manton, *Mary Carpenter*, p. 100. See also pp. 83–5, 102–13. Cf. S. Koven, 'Borderlands', in S. Koven and S. Michel (eds.), *Mothers of a New World. Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, 1993), pp. 96ff.

(as Elizabeth Fry's had been before her) to that of specialist in girls' reclamation alone. Admittedly her own ill-health and 'anomalous' Unitarian religious beliefs played some part in this process of career control but so did her own ingrained belief in a gendered division of mental and practical competences. It was not until a following generation of explicitly feminist critics of 'gendered expertise' had made their point that the path to professional accreditation of women was reopened.¹²¹

Having surveyed some of the patterns of commitment of representative members of the self-identified rising classes in early Victorian society, we need now to acknowledge that not all moral reform leaders fit into this mould. In particular, it would be censoring the picture if no attempt were made to balance the scale by taking some account of the world of the less culturally optimistic. Not entirely by coincidence this world tends to be metropolitan rather than provincial in outlook, hierarchy-defending rather than hierarchy-dismantling in approach.

We have already glimpsed in our sketch of the temperance movement how some leaders dislodged by 'democratic' sentiment in the 1830s managed to survive to exert revived, money-assisted influence once the charismatic stage of mobilisation had passed. Activists noted it and sometimes grumbled about it at the same time.¹²² Yet, for long-term volunteer campaigning, there was no escaping dependence on those with large, steady incomes and a sense of their own status as gentlemen. The development of educational institutions, designed to assist the blending of mercantile with landed elites into a 'new gentry', began effectively in the 1830s at Arnold's Rugby, and there was a further growth spurt in the Palmerston years after mid-century. This was too late to shape the moral sensibilities of the Reform generation but it does serve as an indicator of the social atmosphere which encouraged conciliation between the various sub-groups of (predominantly) southern, Anglican, London-focused property-owners during a phase of class-threatening instability. As in all cases, we find examples of individuals who evade attempts to reduce them to type.¹²³ The southern-metropolitan model of reformer, however, undoubtedly existed and, with appropriate adjustment, carried on the tradition of conscientious stewardship of inherited or commercially generated fortune as identified in previous chapters.

¹²¹ Manton, *Mary Carpenter*, pp. 105, 119, 124ff., 217–18. Cf. Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, pp. 122ff.

¹²² Dunlop, *Autobiography*, pp. 197–8, 320.

¹²³ Take, e.g., the Congregationalist inventor and industrialist MP, Apsley Pellatt (1791–1863): a Londoner but neither a Churchman nor a service-sector magnate; a prominent sabbatarian but not by means of law enforcement; a colleague (in the Female Protection Society and Associate Institution) of bishops and peers yet a life-long opponent of the privileges of the Established Church (see *DNB*).

Among metropolitan occupations it was banking which, more reliably than most, gave resources, and perhaps motive, to account to God for their use. Significantly, many bankers with a moral reform record came to the work via evangelical charities and missions as these expanded and specialised. Bankers were seldom the actual planners of new movements, even less often the magnetic ‘personalities’ around whom supporters clustered. (At least one was candidly reported as ‘inaudible’ in a report of the proceedings at the annual meeting of the society to which he acted as treasurer.¹²⁴) Yet they did often play a crucial role in funding new projects and in stabilising the volunteer efforts of other enthusiasts. Grandest of all the banker patrons of the post-1832 generation were two Evangelicals in separate city partnerships – R. C. L. Bevan (1809–90) and John Labouchere (1799–1863). Of the two it was Labouchere who stood as subsidy-provider to the more exclusively Anglican range of moral reform associations. (He was a long-serving committee man for the LDOS, for example, and, as treasurer from 1834 onwards, a pillar of the LFS.) Bevan, by contrast, was a pan-evangelical Churchman with volunteer interests ranging from the London City Mission and YMCA to the Evangelical Alliance and Pure Literature Society (of which latter two associations he was treasurer).¹²⁵

Even further up the metropolitan ladder of socially assimilated wealth, moral reform attracted the active support from time to time of a select few from among the wealthiest rentier families of the entire country. Most prominent among these in this era was Lord Robert Grosvenor (1801–93), third son of the first marquess of Westminster, landlord of much of London’s West End. A Whig MP of ‘advanced’ opinions, Grosvenor nonetheless found common ground with the Tory Ashley in promoting the causes of factory reform and juvenile reclamation as well as playing a prominent role as sponsor of volunteer efforts to promote sanitary reform, female protection and the cause of pure literature. Whatever progressive reputation he gained from this, however, was comprehensively lost in 1855 when his attempts to act as mediator between sabbatarians and ‘Sunday modernisers’ produced a Sunday Trading bill which provided the trigger to a notorious series of Hyde Park riots (see p. 188 below), by the end of which Grosvenor stood denounced by *Reynolds’ Newspaper* as ‘a perfect type of his order . . . bigoted, insolent, obstinate and tyrannical’.¹²⁶ This seems a rather sweeping judgement on a man who was within the decade to go about as far as a

¹²⁴ *Labourers’ Friend Magazine*, 3 (1834), p. 67 (speech of John Labouchere).

¹²⁵ For Bevan and Labouchere, see entries in *BDEB*; Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 164. John Labouchere was, incongruously, the father of Henry, later Victorian radical Liberal MP.

¹²⁶ Quoted from Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, p. 238. See also *DNB*; *BDEB*; Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, p. 277. Grosvenor’s specific voluntary activities in the mid-century years include taking the chair at the first annual meeting of the Associate Institution, committee membership of the Health of Towns Association, and a foundation vice-presidency of the Pure Literature Society.

(by now) hereditary peer could in declaring support for radical Liberal causes. (He was created Baron Ebury in 1857.) There was, all the same, a defensiveness in much of Grosvenor's radicalism which became more evident in the later years of his life – years which he devoted largely to the defence of the liturgy of the Church of England against the subversion of High Church 'ritualists'.

The real cultural counter-revolutionaries were, however, not often to be found among the Whig aristocracy, nor among city business elites either. For the systematic, often profoundly pessimist, critics of commercial-industrial society we find ourselves moving to the Tory side in politics and the landed or state service sector of economic life. We also find ourselves moving to a significant extent across a divide between socially conditioned types of evangelicalism – from post- to pre-millennialists in Boyd Hilton's classification.¹²⁷

Perhaps the best-documented example of a life committed to moral reform in reaction against the market-accepting new order is that of the ill-fated Captain Brenton, last met as leader of a revolt from the Mendicity Society on behalf of vagrant children (see p. 156 above). Edward Pelham Brenton (1774–1839) was the younger son of an admiral, a naval officer himself during the French wars, and a natural paternalist. As his brother (also an admiral) summed it up in a posthumous memoir: 'From his earliest infancy, he was remarkable for kindness and cheerfulness of disposition.'¹²⁸ This kindness acquired an anti-commercial tinge in the later 1820s as a result of an investigation (as a guardian of Marylebone workhouse) of the conditions of workhouse children apprenticed out to tradesmen. By the time of the Reform bill crisis Brenton was in full cry, not only against the abuse of authority by heartless ratepayer-driven officialdom but against the received truths of 'Malthusian' political economy as well, and his critique had gained an apocalyptic edge of 'national judgements' foretold:

The scourge from heaven, the cholera morbus, has reached our shores, and seems to me as if sent in mercy to rouse us from our torpor, not to thin our population, which has been blasphemously called 'redundant', but to teach us the value of man – the reciprocal and mutual dependence of the rich on the poor.¹²⁹

His solution to urban degradation was, as we have already seen, a blueprint for economic, sanitary and moral regeneration in agricultural resettlement sponsored by both volunteer and rate-assisted means. In these settlements (possibly presided over by retired service officers) boys would be taught the use of 'Bible and spade', girls of 'Bible, broom and needle'. It was a vision of a world restored rather than transformed in every respect except population distribution (which Brenton eventually decided would have to be assisted by an

¹²⁷ Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 15–19.

¹²⁸ Brenton, *Memoir*, p. 33. ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58. See also pp. 47–8, 159, 174.

empire-strengthening emigration programme). But it was a vision requiring those of inherited status and role to do their duty or face the prospect of a cultural breakdown which might well lead to their social extinction.

Where men like Brenton led, others by the 1830s more hesitantly followed. Most celebrated of all, in retrospect, was ‘the people’s Earl’, Lord Shaftesbury (1801–85). There is no doubt that Shaftesbury (or Ashley as he remained until June 1851) envisioned for himself, as a young man, a life of public service – public service defined in a family-conditioned Tory paternalist way as the discharge of duty attached to rank. Like Wilberforce before him, Ashley spent many years waiting more than half in hope that his talents would be recognised by appointment to government office. These hopes were conclusively dashed only in 1841 when the incoming Peel government made it clear that Ashley’s paternalist credentials were, if anything, a reason for keeping him away from policy-forming activities, his antagonism to industrial employers a stumbling-block rather than an asset.¹³⁰ And it was certainly true that Ashley’s paternalism had taken on a more millenarian tone in the decade of Whig ascendancy and emergent class politics.

As the evidence suggests, Ashley took up the ‘fortuitous’ offer of acting as Commons mouthpiece for the factory movement in 1833 principally because he thought it a way of demonstrating the continuing fitness of the privileged to rule in an unequally privileged society. By the early 1840s he was still arguing that intervention in market society was necessary to demonstrate to ‘angry, discontented Chartist spirits . . . that men of rank and property can, and do, care for the rights and feelings of all their brethren’.¹³¹ But he was also arguing the need to recognise the inherent sinfulness of all human beings and the need for intervention to make individuals aware of their spiritual as well as social peril in the face of an ultimate (perhaps imminent) divine judgement. At some date in the mid-1830s impossible to pinpoint Ashley had undergone a cumulative conversion experience. Part of the stabilisation of his beliefs which followed involved a commitment to a pre-millennial interpretation of God’s plan for humanity: sinners had to be aware that their Master might indeed ‘suddenly come into his vineyard’ to call them to account before they were prepared for the encounter – aware also that the Lord was entitled to call whole classes and nations of people to account for neglecting to do their known duty. As governments moved to put their trust in markets, therefore, Ashley and his fellow volunteers moved in a compensatory direction:

¹³⁰ Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 143, 145–50, 195.

¹³¹ Shaftesbury diary, 24 August 1840, quoted in Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, p. 126. For the circumstances surrounding Ashley’s 1833 acceptance of the role of factory movement parliamentary spokesman on M. T. Sadler’s failure to secure a seat, see pp. 73–6. For evidence of the continuing force of class antagonism in Ashley’s motivation to voluntarist commitment, see the 1848 diary outburst against ‘Cobden, Bright and all that dismal crew’ quoted at p. 273.

[I]t is not by might or by arms, by science, by commercial prosperity, or by secular education that this country can be saved. It is only by the evangelicalization [sic] of her people – it is only by giving to them . . . the internal principle of self-control that will enable them in some measure, to use their privileges so that they may be enabled to govern themselves.¹³²

After exclusion from hope of government office in 1841, Ashley moved quickly to establish and expand his own non-party-political base of support. Speaking tours and direct contact with ‘the people’, sponsorship of volunteer associations and related activities provoked his complaint made in 1847 that he was ‘not roasted whole, but hashed and minced by engagements, chairs, speeches, committees, etc.’.¹³³ He had become, like Wilberforce before him, a public rather than a political presence, though unlike Wilberforce an often despairing one in private. To record his apocalyptic reactions to the passing of the 1867 Reform Act would be to pre-empt discussion of an era still to be explored: it remains the case, all the same, that his forebodings of religious infidelity and violent social breakdown long predated 1867. While others (even Ashley for a brief time) welcomed the end of the Chartist era as a moment of social rebirth, the commercial and political distractions of the 1850s suggested not spiritual peace but fresh danger: the prospect of the country sinking ‘as Belshazzar, in the midst of feasting’.¹³⁴ Where the optimistic apostles of progress saw wealth, stability and moral refinement advancing hand in hand, Shaftesbury took none of these links for granted. Every stage of modern social development was equally precarious. It remained, however, the duty of the privileged to prepare to give an account of their stewardship to the Almighty, come what might.

Critics: moral reform and English liberties

The specific circumstances which had produced Shaftesbury’s comparison of England’s vulnerability with that of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, was in fact the series of confrontations between police and demonstrators in Hyde Park in the summer of 1855 known as the Sunday Trading riots. Widely interpreted by contemporary politicians as an indicator of the limits beyond which state power ought not to be stretched in support of moral reform, the disturbances draw attention to two distinctive aspects of the impact of moral reform on early Victorian society. On the one hand, it was clear, moral reform organisations were, after all, proving adept at setting agendas for political debate in the expanded public

¹³² Ashley: speech to the 1849 annual meeting of the Church Pastoral Aid Society, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 311. Ashley’s religious conversion and its impact on his social analysis is assessed in Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 102–5, 601, and in Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 95–6, 212–13.

¹³³ Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, p. 256.

¹³⁴ Diary of the seventh earl of Shaftesbury, 8 July 1855, Broadlands papers, University of Southampton, SHA/PD/7.

arena, if not always equally successful at controlling the outcome. On the other hand, the very visibility of moral reform as a politically active project was raising grass-roots opposition on a scale not previously encountered. These two developments were, to a significant degree, linked.

From the tactical point of view of the committed moral reformer, the reform of the electoral system (national and local) in the early 1830s opened up an era of both opportunity and risk. To opportunity-seekers the coming of reform gave an impetus to the belief that the future lay with those who could organise ‘pressure from without’ on political elites. In particular, the story of the campaign to achieve the abolition of slavery in 1833 became a reference point for those who followed. Publicity, public meetings, canvassing of voters and pledging of candidates seemed the techniques best calculated to work in the new era. Historians have pointed to the structural reasons why this should have been so. Between 1832 and 1867 – the ‘heyday’ of the reform pressure group – a variety of electoral relationships gave leverage to volunteer association. Parliamentary constituencies were of manageable size, community-focused rather than patron-dominated or class-segregated. Voters were still required to cast their votes openly, thus allowing enforcement of group discipline by community pressure. Yet voters also needed for the first time to be registered, thus generating pressure for the development of a permanent electoral organisation at local level. This in turn gave opportunities to local networks able to provide it.¹³⁵

The result was an era of, at first, exuberant moral reform mobilisation. The antislavery movement continued to set new records in constituency canvassing and petition-signing. In 1837–8, spurred on by the prospect of an election precipitated by the death of William IV and the accession of Victoria, the Nonconformist-dominated British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society arranged a (United Kingdom-wide) series of petitions against the West Indian apprenticeship system. The result was a series of petitions to the House of Commons supported by 1,113,091 signatories in tandem with an address to the monarch from the Women of Great Britain and Ireland signed by more than 700,000 (449,540 from England and Wales alone). This set a standard not easily surpassed, though in 1845 the British Association for the Promotion of Temperance managed to collect and present 200,000 signatures in favour of Sunday half-day closing, and in 1850 the LDOS and its allies were able to collect 653,206 signatures to petition for an end to Sunday postal services.¹³⁶ One of the innovations of the era, as the Anti-Slavery Society effort illustrates, was the female address

¹³⁵ D. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure. A Study in the History of Victorian Reform Agitations* (Hassocks, 1977), pp. 10–12. For the role available to women in constituency politics during this period (not specifically explored by Hamer), see M. Cragoe, “‘Jenny Rules the Roost’: Women and Electoral Politics, 1832–68”, in K. Gleadle and S. Richardson (eds.), *Women in British Politics, 1760–1860* (2000), ch. 8.

¹³⁶ Cf. 1,280,000 signatures on the first Chartist petition of 1839. Petition statistics are taken from Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 66–7; *National Temperance Advocate*, 2 (1846), pp. 1–3; *LDOS Report no. 19* (1850), p. 15.

to the (female) monarch. This culture-sensitive tactic helped to legitimise the expression of women's views on 'public issues' on grounds both of Christian duty and of maternal or domestic inclination, thus partly neutralising previous evangelical qualms about the potentially coarsening effect of public association on women's character. (The exclusion of women from public *speaking* was, however, confirmed by the precedent set by the London Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840 in declining to accept female delegates.¹³⁷)

The degree to which petitions, addresses and canvassing influenced the legislature of course varied. The 1837–8 campaign against West Indian apprenticeship was an unqualified success in terms of immediate political outcome (though more by generation of a fear among West Indies legislatures of 'worse to come' than on the conversion of a stable majority of MPs at Westminster, it has to be added).¹³⁸ Other campaigns usually fell short of their declared goal, leaving their promoters to claim no more than educative impact. One campaign, as we shall see shortly, had an impact directly contrary to that intended. (This was the 1850 campaign against Sunday postal deliveries.) Even so, it seems fair to deduce, the sheer frequency of these mobilisations accustomed old and new political elites alike to their normality and, eventually, to their utility as devices for the transmission (or, alternatively, dissipation) of cultural energy. 'You glorify yourselves that you have abolished the slave trade and slavery', Richard Cobden admonished fellow MPs, yet '[w]hatever you have done to break down any abomination or barbarism in this country has been done by associations and leagues out of this House'.¹³⁹ Confronted by such assertions, politicians and moral reform leaders alike were disinclined to deny them. They did, however, have their reservations from time to time.

From the point of view of moral reform campaigners, the chief dilemma to be faced was that between ends and means. As experiments in the 1840s and 50s demonstrated, effective mobilisation by 'associations and leagues' required a high degree not only of electoral energy but of electoral technique and guile as well. Pace-setting pressure groups – most notably the Anti-Corn Law League from 1842, and the Anti-State Church Association (Liberation Society) from 1847 – began to move beyond simple petitioning, canvassing and pledging to the nomination of candidates and the management of electoral registration of voters.¹⁴⁰ Coercive tactics of this sort brought respect from political party organisers but at a cost of earning the reputation of acting like any other interest group. As early as 1831 the Agency Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society

¹³⁷ See, e.g., *Females' Advocate* (1845), p. 102. For the origins of the evangelical female petition, see C. Midgley, 'From Supporting Missions to Petitioning Parliament', in Gleadle and Richardson, *Women in British Politics*, pp. 82–5. For the 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention setback, see Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 158ff.

¹³⁸ Tyrrell, *Sturge*, pp. 81–2.

¹³⁹ Hollis, 'Introduction', in *Pressure From Without*, pp. 1–7 at p. 6.

¹⁴⁰ Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, pp. 65–8.

had identified such ‘over-politicisation’ as a temptation to be resisted and had instructed its travelling agents accordingly:

The Committee consider [abolition] to be a question essentially of a religious character, and though in some degree mixed up on the one hand with matters of political economy, and on the other with the liberty of the subject, it is important not to abandon the high ground of Christian duty, for the sake of gaining the support of a party, or exacting the applause of a popular assembly.¹⁴¹

Thereafter it became commonplace for moral reform voluntary associations to claim to act more altruistically than mere interest groups by pledging to exclude ‘all politics and peculiarities of religion’ from their discussions and publications. This proved easier to put into words than into practice. Political partisanship came naturally to activists whose thought patterns classified campaigns against economic and ecclesiastical ‘monopoly’ alike as aspects of a project of moral transformation.¹⁴² The strategic implications of this trend towards politicisation along culture-defined lines for new pressure groups such as the United Kingdom Alliance (founded 1853) were considerable and will be explored further in chapter 5.

From the point of view of practising politicians, by contrast, the chief dilemma they faced when dealing with moral reform leaders lay in deciding how representative they were of the public opinion they claimed to represent.¹⁴³ From this perspective, the abolition of slavery was an easy case – it affected the everyday lives of few English voters (or even non-voters) in any materially measurable way. Matters might be different when dealing with an issue requiring continuing administrative intervention such as policing, and it is at this point we pick up the thread of discussion last traced to the foundation of the London New Police in 1829 and the passing of the New Poor Law in 1834.

In the course of the turbulent years of ‘Chartist threat’ from the late 1830s to mid-century various government efforts were made to spread metropolitan standards of public order to provincial (especially urban provincial) England. By the time of the Palmerston government’s Police Act of 1856 they could claim to have succeeded, after a fashion.¹⁴⁴ This had its impact on moral reform activities. No longer were significant groupings of reformers driven into action by an anxiety to correct police and poor law policy on grounds of principle as they had been in the 1820s.¹⁴⁵ The role played by voluntary associations under

¹⁴¹ *Agency Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society. Report* (1832), p. 3.

¹⁴² See, e.g., Tyrrell, *Sturge*, pp. 147–8; and Livesey, *Autobiography*, pp. 21–5, on active links with the Liberation Society and Anti-Corn Law League.

¹⁴³ Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, pp. 32ff.; Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 429–30, 433ff.

¹⁴⁴ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp. 507–16. Cf., however, Inwood, ‘Policing London’s Morals’, pp. 129–46.

¹⁴⁵ For anxieties about the *general* applicability of the principles of individual responsibility underlying criminal punishment policy, however, see p. 163 above; Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 131–41.

these circumstances was an increasingly routinised one – a role focused on the detection and prosecution of offenders. The prosecuting role remained a major one. Until some time after a director of public prosecutions was appointed in 1879 prosecution remained a normal responsibility of private citizens or associations, and was only gradually taken over by local police forces.¹⁴⁶

What volunteer prosecuting action was intended to achieve, however, varied from society to society. In contrast to associations such as the London Mendicity Society, which entered into formal alliance with the police to ensure uniformity of enforcement of the vagrancy laws, other societies still aimed to mould behaviour and attitudes by symbolic or exemplary publicity rather than blanket prosecution. Partly it was because they could not afford to do more, but equally it was justified as a calculated attempt to soften the effect of intervention on ‘class relations’ otherwise strained by the steady extension of state authority over the lives of the unpropertied.¹⁴⁷ For evangelicals, an additional motive for symbolic law enforcement was still the bearing of witness against public transgression of divine law – transgression which could be argued to imperil the nation as a whole.

How such campaigns were publicly received, whatever the rationale, was, however, far from predictable. The two most notorious cases of moral reform confronted during this period gave wildly contrasting outcomes. The first was provoked by the RSPCA, the second by the LDOS and the Sunday closing movement.

In the case of the suppression of the annual bull-run through the streets of the midlands market town of Stamford, the RSPCA found itself between 1835 and 1840 battling the entrenched community spirit of a tightly bonded provincial town whose ‘cross-class cultural integration’ moral reformers might under other circumstances have regarded as admirable. As it was, the society in its campaign to suppress animal cruelty was driven first to subterfuge, compelled to gather evidence from undercover agents because of fear of local violence, then (in 1837) towards exemplary prosecution of local offenders through the assize courts because of the complicity of local magistrates in defending ‘customary privilege’, and finally (in 1839) towards lobbying of the Home Office to ensure effective local enforcement of the 1835 Animal Cruelty Act through importation of forty-three dragoons and twenty metropolitan police.¹⁴⁸ As this sequence of expedients illustrates, RSPCA leaders were supporters of deferential social hierarchies by inclination, yet ruthless lobbyists of central authority for the

¹⁴⁶ Emsley, *Crime and Society*, pp. 189–92.

¹⁴⁷ For the relatively restrained number of prosecutions instituted by the RSPCA until the 1860s, see the statistics cited in Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 131; and, for policy rationale, see *RSPCA Report No. 30* (1856), pp. 16–18.

¹⁴⁸ RSPCA minute book 2, fos. 20–5; *Report No. 10* (1836), pp. 63–5; *12* (1838), pp. 10–11; *13* (1839), p. 10. See also R. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 127–35.

resources it controlled when confronted by spectacles ‘abhorrent to the feelings of every humane individual’.¹⁴⁹ The mayor and aldermen of Stamford had two initial options open to them. They could draw on clearly expressed local support and mount an unashamed defence of ancient liberties against outside interference or else attempt to evade suppressive action on the plea of being unable to enforce new standards of public order. They tried each in turn but eventually faced ratepayer revolt as legal expenses mounted. The RSPCA also faced financial strain but had the publicity skills and morale to pursue a five-year battle which it clearly won.

In contrast, the metropolitan Sunday trading riots of June–July 1855 showed a rather different balance of forces between regulators and libertarians – and a very different outcome.¹⁵⁰ As related earlier, the early 1850s were times of heightened commitment for sabbatarian evangelicals. Their activities were both patriotic and paternalist in tone. Among their successes was a restriction on the trading hours of metropolitan drink outlets (the Wilson–Patten Act of 1854), though the LDOS was disappointed that the voice of ‘400,000 petitioners, principally of the working classes’, had not been able to achieve a total ban on Sunday opening. Not among their claimed successes was Lord Robert Grosvenor’s bill of 1855 to restrict Sunday trading more generally. The LDOS denounced this paternalistic attempt to give respite to metropolitan retailers from unbroken seven-day market competition as a law confirming state-excused ‘desecration of the Lord’s Day’ based on expediency rather than ‘religious principle’.¹⁵¹ Yet when, in the weeks that followed the introduction of Grosvenor’s bill, crowds of up to 150,000 took to Sunday mobbing in Hyde Park and window-breaking across the West End, the politicians (and some moral reform leaders) took little persuading to pinpoint sabbatarian pressure-group activity as a key explanation for the outbreak of unrest.¹⁵² The disturbances were certainly a setback to LDOS leaders who, in 1850, had celebrated the impact of their petition campaign in winning a House of Commons resolution ending Sunday postal deliveries as evidence that ‘a great change has been effected in public opinion’.¹⁵³ Clearly, the voices of (chiefly) non-metropolitan Church and Wesleyan

¹⁴⁹ SPCA secretary to mayor of Stamford, 4 Nov. 1835, quoted in *RSPCA Report No. 10* (1836), p. 63.

¹⁵⁰ For three excellent surveys, each with a distinctive focus (on rioters, sabbatarians and police, respectively), see B. Harrison, ‘The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855’, *Historical Journal*, 8 (1965), pp. 219–45; Lewis, *Lighten their Darkness*, pp. 236–42; P. Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London* (Westport CT, 1985), ch. 6.

¹⁵¹ *LDOS Report No. 23* (1854), p. 23; LDOS minute books, 9 July 1855 (fo. 60). For Grosvenor’s statement of motives, see his letter to *The Times*, 29 June 1855, p. 10, cited in Harrison, ‘Sunday Trading Riots’, p. 222.

¹⁵² For crowd size and social composition, see Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London*, pp. 131–3. For the reactions of press and political elites to the riots, see Harrison, ‘Sunday Trading Riots’, pp. 230–8.

¹⁵³ *LDOS Report No. 19* (1850), p. 15.

Methodist evangelicals were only one facet of ‘public opinion’, as a cross-class involuntary alliance of Londoners, supported by *The Times*, made clear to Home Secretary and Metropolitan Police Commissioner alike.¹⁵⁴

Even more damaging from an evangelical point of view was the visible split in propertied ranks which the Hyde Park riots provoked. In September 1855 a cross-class coalition of secular radicals, under the presidency of Leicester MP Sir Joshua Walmsley, launched a National Sunday League with the explicit goal of promoting Sunday opening of public institutions and parks ‘for the instruction, recreation, and innocent amusement of the working classes’.¹⁵⁵ The unseemly scramble which ensued over the following two years to demonstrate to politicians which side more ‘truly’ represented public opinion – and the interests of the working classes in a market-organised society – gave the noisiest announcement possible that evangelical assumptions about moral reform goals and tactics were being contested. In February 1856 a disgusted Lord Shaftesbury himself fell victim when he had to be rescued by police from an infiltrated meeting of the North London Sunday Rest Association, a working-class group over which he had been invited to preside.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, on an even wider front, in periodicals and newspaper columns, a debate was opening up about the moral role of the state itself. What duty did the state have to protect citizens from moral risk in a market-organised society? At what point might state intervention become self-defeating – an attack on the liberties needed to accustom individuals to the self-reliance expected of them? The intellectual climax of this debate was to be reached in 1859 with the publication of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, but the provocations to which Mill responded had been accumulating for some years. Chief among these provocations was an 1856 exchange of views in the columns of *The Times* between the secretary of the United Kingdom Alliance, Samuel Pope, and the young liberal Conservative MP, Lord Stanley (later fifteenth earl of Derby).¹⁵⁷

The case that Pope presented in support of the right of the state to suppress the drink trade was one founded on an assumption of its duty to protect members

¹⁵⁴ In the case of Police Commissioner Mayne, the experience of 1855 merely confirmed existing settled antipathy to police enforcement of ‘moral absolutes’: Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London*, pp. 128–9.

¹⁵⁵ *National Sunday League Record*, October 1856, p. 41; and see Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday*, pp. 102–3, for the class and cultural background of its committee. Its vice-presidents included the radical Unitarian, W. J. Fox MP, and the distinguished political economist, Nassau Senior.

¹⁵⁶ Shaftesbury Diary, 10 Feb. 1856, SHA/PD/7; and see full contextualisation of the event in Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 393–4. The most thorough survey of the sabbatarian/anti-sabbatarian mobilisation of 1855–8 remains Ellis, ‘The Evangelicals and the Sunday Question, 1830–1860’, ch. 8.

¹⁵⁷ *The Times*, 2 Oct. 1856, pp. 8–9. For Mill’s comments on this exchange, see J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. J. M. Robson, in *Collected Works*, vol. xviii (Toronto, 1977), pp. 287–8. For other contributors to the debate, see Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 187–201; Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain*, pp. 246–51.

of the national community against moral danger: 'I claim, as a citizen, a right to legislate whenever my social rights are invaded by the social act of another.' To Stanley, as to Mill, this was the grossest of attacks on the liberty of the individual, as well as an attack by one class on the capacity for moral self-management of another. Stanley, the practical administrator, pointed to the evasions and corruption of public officials likely to result from a law extending state authority beyond its natural limit of citizen acquiescence. Mill, the secular intellectual, stressed the undermining of the process of self-management and moral growth that forcible repression of temptation would encourage. Both agreed on the impropriety of states acting as community agents for the enforcement of 'social rights' to the detriment of individual liberties. In Mill's version of the case, matters reduced to 'one very simple principle': '[T]he only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.'¹⁵⁸

To this onslaught Pope developed the following triple return barrage. First, he asserted, it was no longer the case (or by increasing degrees not the case) that law-making was a class-manipulated activity: 'the law-making power in England is never exercised but on pressure of popular agitation . . . practically controlled and directed by popular opinion'. Second, it was inappropriate to treat individual alcohol consumption as a mere private transaction between trader and customer, as the transaction had social effects dependent on the nature of the product. Drink, being a product which generated 'an irresistible craving', created a situation in which, in defiance of the laws of political economy, 'demand does not limit and regulate supply; supply does create and increase the demand'. And, third, it was pointless to talk of the self-reliant citizen until an environment could be guaranteed to allow the uncorrupted emergence of such citizens. 'Without a law temptations would be multiplied, with temptations multiplied appetite would be increasingly generated, and, in spite of public opinion, the evil would continue to spread. . . . [A] traffic in misery and death . . . weakens the power and impedes the progress of the people.'¹⁵⁹

This justification, refined by the adoption of 'the Permissive Bill' in 1857 to make its claim to community opinion more credible, was the experimental version of a model increasingly relied on by 'progressive' sections of the moral and social reform leadership in the generation to follow. Those who sponsored the argument sought to replace a 'negative', non-interventionist role for the state in the creation of a moralised society by a 'positive', interventionist, one. At mid-century, however, most self-identified moral progressives continued to define the ideal relation between liberty and law in terms of past fears

¹⁵⁸ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 223.

¹⁵⁹ For the distinction between 'trade' and 'traffic', see Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 390.

rather than future possibilities. To activists raised in a tradition of principled voluntarism the vision of society morally transformed by state-assisted environmental protection aroused unease rather than enthusiasm. Not only did it clash with market-based assumptions about the need to train individuals to take responsibility for choice, it also resurrected only half-buried anxieties about the state as traditional enforcer of conformity in religious practice on the pretext of community good.¹⁶⁰ For these reasons, even militant Nonconformists remained sceptical of interpreting Christ's scriptural injunction, 'lead us not into temptation', as a basis for passing laws 'to protect men from their own bad habits'.¹⁶¹ This was beginning to change as Nonconformist provincial urban elites such as the founders of the UKA gradually accustomed themselves to the experience of civic leadership at local level. It had yet to happen in the 1850s.¹⁶²

Chapter 3, it will be recalled, concluded by pointing out that moral reform was – in spite of its successes up to that point – by the start of the Victorian period facing a variety of challenges to its effectiveness as an approach to the management of cultural change. Exploration of early Victorian trends has now revealed how energetically moral reform activists responded, both by adjusting goals and by seeking an expanded range of supporters. The tapping of moral reform enthusiasm was most obviously successful among provincial Nonconformists where the rise of the temperance movement coincided with the emergence of a first generation of citizens determined to exercise the civic rights won by the victories of the reform era. These were the promoters of moral reform as a project of community-assisted self-management. Self-employed craftsmen, retailers and non-manual employees in particular rallied to the side of self-improvement in spite of recurrent temptation to throw in their lot with more class-conscious visions of cultural restructuring. This in turn reinforced existing pressure on non-metropolitan urban elites to prove their moral worth in the reformed arena of political action now available to them. A consequence of this was to increase pressure on traditional elites in landed, aristocratic and Church circles to demonstrate the depth of their commitment to voluntary action on behalf of the oppressed and victimised.

Sometimes, as we have seen, these competitive cultural mobilisations acquired a sectarian edge which pushed them towards the openly party political. This was especially the case in the class-torn era of Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League. Such trends compromised the claims of moral reform

¹⁶⁰ Both Stanley and Mill identified 'positive liberty' programmes as tending towards the destabilisation of religious pluralism: *The Times*, 2 Oct. 1856, p. 9; Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 289.

¹⁶¹ *Nonconformist*, 8 Aug. 1855, quoted in T. Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality. Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1999), p. 179. See also p. 184; Lees, *Life of F. R. Lees*, pp. 83–4.

¹⁶² S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class* (Manchester, 2000), p. 124.

leaders to be driven by altruism rather than class or denominational advantage. Yet, throughout the period, the ‘shared heritage’ of pan-evangelical Christianity was also still at work. With its firm commitment to the defence and extension of domestically grounded self-reliance in a market-organised world, it acted as a counterbalance to naked interest-group politics. Ashley’s advice of 1849 that national salvation depended upon ‘giving to [English people] . . . the internal principle of self-control . . . so that they may be enabled to govern themselves’¹⁶³ was a message with resonance to Churchman and Dissenter, Tory and Whig, aristocrat, middle-class property-owner and self-improving working man alike. By promoting their work on this basis moral reformers were able to retain and, by mid-century, to reassert the distinctive identity of their approach and its practical utility in promoting cultural harmony in an economically and geographically segmented society.

How plausible this claim would continue to be depended, as always, on how adaptive to new conditions moral reform promoters proved to be. As we saw in the final section of this chapter, the over-confidence of sabbatarians and drink-trade regulators in their ability to manage ‘public opinion’ led, in the mid-50s, to a disconcertingly direct backlash against moral reform perceived as a project not of cultural reconciliation but of coercive paternalism. Part of this backlash could be rationalised as an indication of lingering pockets of barbarism yet to be disciplined to modern levels of self-control. A more worrying aspect was, however, the split between evangelical and secular rationalist opinion within propertied ranks about the purpose and justification of ‘recreation’ in a market-driven urban society. A more worrying aspect still – though one not as yet quite at the forefront of debate – was the role of elites of any kind – political, cultural, professional – in a society moving to consider some form of ‘democracy’ as its legitimating principle of political decision-making. These issues and more would emerge to challenge and perplex existing campaigners under the moral reform banner.

¹⁶³ Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, p. 311.

5 Moral individualism: the renewal and reappraisal of an ideal, 1857–1880

When, in 1848, Macaulay had introduced an appreciative reading public to the view that the history of their society since 1688 had been ‘eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement’, it was not a judgement which could have been expected to persuade all, and, indeed, it did not. By the post-Crimean War era, however, it was a view at risk of becoming a platitude. ‘We live in an age of constant progress – moral, social, and political’, proclaimed a Conservative Prime Minister in 1858 echoing his Whig-Liberal predecessor’s view of 1856 that ‘progressive improvement is the law of our moral nature’.¹ The mid-Victorian years were years of demonstrably strengthening confidence in the stability of English society – which is not to say that they were years of complacency. The sense of unrelenting progress requiring constant awareness, calculation and adjustment was equally a characteristic of the times, especially in the peak phase of ‘the coming of democracy’, 1866–74.

In search of ‘progressive improvement’: contexts of mid-Victorian moral reform

On two fronts, however, it was possible to declare as early as the 1850s that England had indeed crossed over into a ‘new moral era’. The first anxiety to dissipate was the Malthusian anxiety about unrestrained population growth. The nightmare vision of two previous generations of educated elites more or less vanished from view. Birth-rates, which had hit an all-time recorded high in the years 1821–6, had now worked their way through the period of maximum ‘moral impact’ – indeed (had contemporaries known) were within a generation of becoming problematic for an opposite reason. (The Bradlaugh–Besant trial for the obscene libel of spreading birth-control information was to take place in 1877.²)

¹ T. B. Macaulay, *History of England*, vol. i, ch. 1. Cf. [J. W. Croker], ‘Mr Macaulay’s History of England’, *Quarterly Review*, 84 (1849), pp. 549–630, esp. pp. 586, 602. For Derby in 1858, see K. T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846–1886* (Oxford, 1998), p. 208; for Palmerston in 1856, see J. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 168.

² Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, pp. 528–9.

In addition, this enlarged population was distributing itself in ways which were losing their previous potential to alarm. City growth, while still notable (and set to accelerate in the decade following 1870), was now no longer the raw experiment of improvisation which had marked the spread of industrial town life across the midlands and north up to mid-century. From the 1850s onwards a combination of demographic trend and adjusted elite perception interacted to convince mid-Victorian social commentators that they lived in a more orderly, more controllable environment. City life, to a previously unimagined degree, was becoming a normal experience for all social classes.³

This perception of normality was reinforced for many observers by a growth in confidence about the controllability of violence. It was not that mid-Victorian cities suddenly became crime-free. Per capita incidence of assault and of property-related crime, for example, did not show a notable downward trend until the early to mid-1870s; and the press-assisted 'ticket of leave' and 'garotting' panics which accompanied the dismantling of the transportation system of criminal law punishment between 1853 and 1867 had, in fact, intensified urban anxiety about personal safety for a time.⁴ Trends in order-challenging acts of public violence, however, started to show a steady proportional decline from mid-century. Riot and assaults on police officers became in middle-class memory part of the 'bad old days', this in spite of Matthew Arnold's well-publicised comments on the 1866 levelling of the Hyde Park railings.⁵

The 'transition to order' – or at least to an educated perception of crime as a containable social problem – was itself assisted by two mid-century developments. The first was the acceptance by the propertied classes of the need in an urbanising society to take up the burden of funding a nationally comprehensive professional police. (This was formally proclaimed by the passing of the 1856 Police Act.⁶) The second was the 'maturing' of the national economy in a way which ensured the diversification at last of both food supply and labour market risk. It was in fact only after the opening of the global market for bulk foodstuffs in the late 1870s that working-class purchasing power became

³ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Town and City', in Thompson (ed.), *CSHB*, i.10–11, 33ff.; also A. Lees, *Cities Perceived. Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820–1940* (Manchester, 1985), pp. 48–9.

⁴ P. Bartrip, 'Public Opinion and Law Enforcement: The Ticket-of-Leave Scares in Mid-Victorian Britain', in V. Bailey (ed.), *Policing and Punishment in 19th-Century Britain* (1981), pp. 150–81, esp. pp. 158, 162–6. Cf. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, p. 215.

⁵ On the 'transition to order', see Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland*, p. 553; J. Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England 1700–1870* (1979), pp. 294–300. For the steady fall in property-related crime rates (burglary excepted) from the 1870s, see V. Gatrell, 'The Decline of Theft and Violence in Victorian and Edwardian England and Wales', in V. Gatrell, B. Lenman and G. Parker (eds.), *Crime and the Law. The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500* (1980), pp. 283, 286–91, 302–4, 317–18. For Gatrell's second thoughts about popular acceptance of police authority, see V. Gatrell, 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman State', in *CSHB*, iii.285–6.

⁶ Palmer, *Police and Protest*, pp. 507–10.

permanently entrenched at a significantly higher level; yet, from the 1850s forward, it was at least no longer to be feared that high agricultural prices and periods of high urban unemployment would coincide.⁷ The market economy, after the convulsions of the 1840s, had at last stabilised. This was the foundation on which ‘the age of equipoise’ was built.

If it was now safe to assume the emergence of a stable, market-based society, that did not of itself abolish anxiety about the vulnerability of working-class morals. Indeed, given the increasing class-segregation of urban everyday lives, there was – in a vague but oppressive sense – even more reason for middle-class investigators to fear what they might ‘discover’ as they periodically explored ‘darkest England’.

As a broad generalisation, what morally concerned middle-class observers discovered fell into two mind sets. A first mind set dominant until the later 1860s and early 70s can perhaps be labelled backward-looking to the degree that its concerns were still significantly linked with work-discipline anxieties. The continuing rise in per capita alcohol consumption until the mid-70s kept well alive those concerns about individual self-control (including drink-related violence) which helped to sustain the temperance attack on the drink trade: ‘I can get my husband, sir, past two public houses, but I cannot get him past twenty.’⁸ The validity of the moral reform case being mounted here was, as we shall see, to receive at least partial official recognition with the Beer Act of 1869 and Bruce’s Licensing Act of 1872 signalling a restrictive adjustment to the experiment in free trade launched by the Beer Act of 1830.

From the mid to late 1860s, however, the sustained rise in the purchasing power of working-class wages mentioned above helped to condition the opening of a new phase in middle-class evaluation of working-class moral resilience. The drink trade was still a major worry, but it was the wider range of consumption choices available to a growing proportion of the working population legitimately earning above-subsistence wages which attracted new comment. Music halls (from the 1850s in London, the 1860s in the provinces), the popular press (from the early 1870s) and the accompanying spread of commercialised sport and gambling, all provided a focus for recurrently obsessive debate around the theme of working-class ability to manage limited resources in an age of commercially promoted temptation.⁹ ‘Luxury’, it seemed, had finally displaced

⁷ Gatrell, ‘Decline of Theft and Violence’, pp. 311–12; Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 78–9, 84–5.

⁸ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 336, quoting [UK] *Alliance News*, 19 Oct. 1872. For general statistics of alcohol consumption and of drink-related public order offences, see Harrison, *Drink*, 306–7; A. E. Dingle, ‘Drink and Working-Class Living Standards in Britain, 1870–1914’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 25 (1972), pp. 608–22, esp. pp. 608–12.

⁹ For a comprehensive overview, see Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, pp. 288–306; also J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd* (1984), ch. 7; J. K. Walton, ‘Towns and Consumerism’, in M. Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. iii: 1840–1950 (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 22, esp. pp. 717–18, 727ff.

'disorder' as the key threat to working-class capacity for self-control. As so often before, the perception of moral danger was intensified to the extent that educated expectations of working-class self-reliance had also risen. The coming of state-enforced elementary education after 1870 limited the value of children as a family economic resource; attempts to encourage working-class self-reliance in old age led some to prescribe ever more disciplined programmes of saving for wage-earners. 'Unrespectable' working-class families or individuals who failed to rise adequately to the duties of cultural citizenship now imposed upon them could expect increasing suspicion of their moral credentials from investigators both state-empowered and voluntary (not to mention a certain amount of hostility from respectability-seeking working-class neighbours).¹⁰

Yet, paradoxically, all these developments in material circumstance and perception were taking place during a period in which the propertied middle classes were adjusting attitudes towards work and leisure, self-control and the claims of 'human nature' within their own lives. Mid-Victorian working-class day trippers to middle-class seaside resorts might be thought vulgar, and various devices put in place to deter them, but the legitimacy of their search for recreation – for release from the constraints of an 'over-regulated' working life – could hardly be rejected. The middle classes had already revalued their own moral priorities to acknowledge the need.

For evangelicals the revaluation demanded more than a little soul-searching: 'It cannot be concealed that continuous physical enjoyment, such as this tour presented, is dangerous luxury if it be not properly used', confessed the canoeing Evangelical, John MacGregor, in 1866.¹¹ Yet the puritan distrust of leisure was, by the 1870s, a shrinking cultural position. In particular, the spreading prestige of male competitive sport among the new generation emerging from the games-fixated public school and university system ensured that physical recreations previously associated dismissively with aristocratic idleness or lower-class immaturity were now accepted as legitimate adult pastimes, perhaps even on a Sunday. By 1880 the middle-class suburbs had irreversibly entered the age of golf and tennis, possibly in male reaction against the constraints of early Victorian domestic culture, certainly in modification of former codes of leisure self-denial.¹²

¹⁰ G. K. Behlmer, *Friends of the Family. The English Home and its Guardians, 1850–1940* (Stanford CA, 1998), ch. 2; Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 141–56; E. Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science* (1996), pp. 107, 162–80. For contrasting approaches to the study of Victorian working-class respectability, see Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, ch. 4; P. Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 2.

¹¹ Hodder, *John MacGregor*, pp. 284–5.

¹² For evidence of shifting cultural attitudes, see Bailey, *Popular Culture*, ch. 1; Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, pp. 259–60, 267–8. For the influence of 'public school' socialisation on middle-class adult male pastimes, see J. Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes 1870–1914* (Manchester, 1993), ch. 1, esp. p. 5. The case for a later Victorian male revolt

The more widely read of social commentators on this process were greatly tempted to trace the culture shift to a perceived erosion of the intellectual foundations of Christian faith and, indeed, of the concept of humans as autonomous moral actors. (As Frances Power Cobbe deduced it in the 1870s, ‘the moral results of Darwinism on the character’ could be regarded as nothing short of ‘paralyzing’ if interpreted as ‘the idea that Conscience was merely an hereditary instinct fixed in the brain by the interests of the tribe, and in no sense the voice of God’.¹³) In such a morally disabled universe even a strictly secularised version of moral self-responsibility such as Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859) began to look intellectually deficient.¹⁴

Yet, if the capacity of humans to reach a state of individual moral autonomy proved a philosophical mirage the closer it was approached, this was not held by moral reformers to absolve them from making their best efforts to assist its survival in their strata of society and its spread across other sections of mid-Victorian society. The problem, as most of them formulated it, was how to foster self-reliance of character in a market-organised society without at some point intervening so visibly in the lives of the vulnerable as to undermine the credibility of the project itself. The experiments in resocialisation which resulted will form a recurrent focus of attention throughout this chapter. The problem as most reformers experienced it in practice, however, had one even more slippery aspect. Even if action could be agreed upon, whom exactly should one attempt to persuade in order to make action effective?

The question was an unavoidable one because mid-Victorian concepts of citizenship themselves were under reconstruction. It is an obvious enough point to make in hindsight: this was an age in which the propertied gatekeepers of political citizenship were gradually willing to accept the citizen qualifications of nearly a million adult English males previously excluded from the franchise, and to justify it largely on grounds of demonstrated moral character.¹⁵ Yet even those who lived through the period were aware enough of the implications for public debate of moving from a society which, as late as 1855–61, used the taxation system to restrict the circulation of published political information, to one which by 1870 openly encouraged universal literacy and the expression of ‘local opinion’ on ‘national issues’.¹⁶

against domestication is put in J. Tosh, *A Man’s Place. Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (1999), ch. 8, and questioned in M. Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male?’, *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 637–52 at p. 643.

¹³ *Life of Frances Power Cobbe. By Herself* (2 vols., 1894), ii.176. Cf. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, ch. 4.

¹⁴ S. Petrow, *Policing Morals. The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 7–12. Mill’s system of moral self-management always did rely on a premise of reflective adult rationality available to all which contemporaries found difficult to believe applicable to ‘real life’: Harrison, *Drink*, p. 193.

¹⁵ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 214–17, 231.

¹⁶ D. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 234–6.

Moral reform activists who lived through the period of ‘the coming of democracy’ were of course far from detached spectators of the process. Some (as we shall see) deplored the end of civilisation as they knew it. More typically they accepted political adjustment as inevitable, and some of them set out actively to promote it as an aspect of moral progress. Nonconformist-led voluntary associations such as the Liberation Society and the United Kingdom Alliance were in fact very successful in locating and organising ‘new publics’ from the early 1860s onwards, winning in the process the respectful attention of political party organisers in expanding provincial constituencies.¹⁷ The implications of this expansion of the public sphere were, at one level of evaluation, highly encouraging to most mainstream moral reform leaders: ‘pressure from without’ on law-makers was now being acknowledged by political elites as normal, even praiseworthy, citizen behaviour.¹⁸ At another level, as we shall see, the implications were more problematic for moral reform leaders. Political mobilisation of citizens strained relations in existing pan-evangelical networks of moral reform as ‘Church’ and ‘Chapel’ became the nuclei of opposing political forces in the race to make contact with an extended electorate. It further strained relations between volunteer associations for ‘political’ and ‘cultural’ purposes as the emergence of professionally managed constituency politics threatened the capture and asset-stripping of the original moral reform networks themselves.¹⁹ And most spectacularly of all it strained relations between men and women moral reform activists as the enactment of franchise extension set in place new barriers of formalised gender exclusion.

As a final complication, the drift to democracy had the effect of provoking a reappraisal among educated elites of the respective claims of electorates and experts in the development of public policy. This confrontation was to peak with the Contagious Diseases Acts repeal campaign of the 1870s (by which time it had become as much a confrontation between sexes as between classes). But its beginnings went back to mid-century. Just three years after the politicians had dismissed Edwin Chadwick for usurping their role there was founded in Birmingham in 1857 an institution to provide precisely that forum for the creation of an ‘enlightened’ expert-assisted public opinion which the politicians and public policy elites found they now needed. This was the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.²⁰ The struggle for control over agendas and outcomes of the annual (published) discussions of the Social Science Association

¹⁷ Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure*, chs. 6 and 9; D. Thompson, ‘The Liberation Society 1844–1868’, in Hollis, *Pressure From Without*, pp. 210–38, esp. 222–7, 232–3; Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 281–2.

¹⁸ Hollis, ‘Introduction’ to *Pressure from Without*, pp. 1–26.

¹⁹ A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (1976), pp. 162–72; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 136–7; Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, ch. 4.

²⁰ L. Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics in Victorian Britain. The Social Science Association 1857–1886* (Cambridge, 2002), chs. 2 and 9; Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science*, ch. 6.

between 1857 and its disintegration in 1886 was to have a marked effect on the shaping of the moral reform efforts of ‘the generation of 1857’. Its meetings were to prove as fertile a seed-bed for the propagation of new moral reform causes as those of the Proclamation Society two generations before, and via a similarly targeted elite ‘public’. Fitzjames Stephen was playing the pessimist as always by complaining in 1879 that ‘this is not the age for public life; it is emphatically the age for special knowledge and study’,²¹ but he had a point.

Moral reform in a decade of democracy deferred

What of the priorities of moral reform elites in the post-Crimean decade? As was to be predicted, the Palmerston years produced a disparate set of responses. Those who were well placed to exploit existing networks of evangelical activity made the best of an unusually direct relationship with key politicians while opportunity lasted. (Shaftesbury was Palmerston’s step-son-in-law: his wife was Lady Palmerston’s daughter by her first marriage.) Those who (like militant Dissenters) looked to an ultimately democratised future used the time to practise and extend their campaigns of citizen self-empowerment. And those who (like most Social Science Association enthusiasts) distrusted unguided democracy but accepted the need to prepare for a modernisation of the public sphere, began a systematic review of those areas of public policy where the claims of professional expertise might be argued to outbid the uninformed whims of mere voters.

From the vantage point of 1857 the ultimate fruitfulness of each of these approaches was difficult to predict. With hindsight, the centrality of the Social Science Association’s approach to moral reform – rescue from politics through professional expertise – seems difficult to dispute. Yet the Social Science Association’s inaugural meeting in Birmingham in October of that year was as yet hardly a focus of attention very far beyond its ‘between five and six thousand’ attenders. Far more pressing matters of public attention included the spring renewal of electoral support for the fragile Palmerston government, the autumn financial panic which hit the City of London, and above all the unchristian barbarities of the Indian Mutiny as they were reported between mid-1857 and mid-1858.

It was this last event which, at the time, most powerfully shaped short-term moral reform priorities: ‘Mutinies in India spreading . . . Lord God, chastise, but destroy us not’, as Lord Shaftesbury prayed in his diary.²² We have seen in the previous chapter how evangelicals had already braced themselves in

²¹ Quoted in S. Collini, *Public Moralists. Political Life and Intellectual Thought in Britain 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991), p. 236.

²² Shaftesbury diary, 11 July 1857, Broadlands papers, University of Southampton, SHA/PD/7.

expectation of a time of trial by mid-century. The Indian setback, given the place of India over the period since 1813 in the evangelical vision of global conversion, struck hard. Among the wider newspaper-reading public it helped to recharge emotions surrounding the protection of defenceless innocents in a way which led first to calls for the punishment of predators, then to demands for the militant self-purification of a nation claiming the protection of the Almighty.²³ In terms of volunteer mobilisation this led in a variety of directions. The punitive urge assisted the Vice Society, for example, in its lobbying on behalf of Lord Campbell's Obscene Publications Act of August 1857, and in its efforts to coordinate London parish vestry suppression of street prostitution between 1858 and 1864.²⁴ The self-purifying urge, by contrast, led to an open campaign of purely moral suasion for the reclamation of prostitutes in the 1859 Midnight Meeting Movement.

The campaign for the reclamation of fallen women (and the protection of those in danger of falling) is a revealing one in the way that it illustrates a system of class and gender relations 'between two worlds'. In spite of earlier attempts to reclassify prostitutes as victims rather than public nuisances, little lasting culture shift had taken place by mid-century. In 1849 the evangelical Lt. Thomas Blackmore RN had, in co-operation with Theophilus Smith of the Female Aid Society, tried and failed to reclaim prostitutes from the streets by 'midnight meetings', and in 1853 a further group of Evangelicals under the patronage of Lord Shaftesbury had set up a Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children. It, too, failed to make much headway until, in the emotion-charged atmosphere of 1857–8 its goal of providing refuge from the ruthlessness of the female metropolitan labour market suddenly fused with evangelically shaped 'public mood'.²⁵

At that point a complex tangle of experimental efforts sprang into formal existence, among them the London Female Preventive and Reformatory Institution (1857), and the Female Mission to the Fallen (1858).²⁶ Supporters of these and other volunteer efforts were then inspired to launch a general reclamation

²³ 'The cruelties of the Sepoys, and, above all, the indignities which English ladies have undergone, have inflamed the nation to a degree unprecedented within my memory': Macaulay to his sister, Hannah, Lady Trevelyan, 10 August 1857, in *Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, ed. T. Pinney (6 vols., Cambridge, 1974–81), vi.102.

²⁴ *The Times*, 4 Jan. 1858, p. 4, and 7 Jan., p. 10; E. W. Thomas, *Twenty-Five Years' Labour among the Friendless and Fallen* (2nd edn, 1886), pp. 107–8, 165.

²⁵ Note the surge in Rescue Society income between 1853–4 (£250) and 1858–9 (£5,000): *Magdalen's Friend*, 1 (1860), p. 26. For the early history of individual experiments with midnight meetings, see [Theophilus Smith], *Statement of the Origin, Proceedings and Results of the Midnight Meetings for the Recovery of Fallen Women* (5th edn, [1860]), p. 4; Lt. John Blackmore, *The London by Moonlight Mission* (1860), p. 18; M. Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford, 1994), p. 92.

²⁶ A. O. Charles, *The Female Mission to the Fallen* (1860), pp. 3–4; *Magdalen's Friend*, 1 (1860), p. 152, and 2 (1862), p. 43.

campaign (the Midnight Meeting Movement, 1859) which, by 1860, claimed to have sponsored meetings attended by 4,000 prostitutes in the West End of London and in provincial cities. The number of refuges for those reclaimed (or saved from falling) rose in equal proportion: the ‘mid-Victorian rescue boom’ had, by 1860, provided London with nineteen rescue homes and the provinces with another forty.²⁷ The prospectus of the pace-setting London Female Preventive and Reformatory Institution set out the objectives of the reclamation work:

I To seek the destitute and fallen by voluntary missionary effort.

II To afford temporary protection to friendless young women, whose circumstances expose them to danger; also to effect the rescue of the fallen, especially those decoyed from the country, by admitting them to the benefits of the Institution . . .

VI Above all, to seek the spiritual welfare of the inmates.²⁸

As this declaration makes plain, the defining characteristic of the whole late-50s movement was its discourse of ‘Magdalenism’. Magdalenism relied on a ‘rhetoric of non-condemnation, of a shared human nature, and of fraternity and sisterhood’ to distinguish itself from ‘traditionalists’ who declined to distinguish between sin and criminality. The assumption behind ‘rescue work’ was the optimistic one that women ‘fell’ because of environmental misfortune and might, therefore, be reclaimed by careful resocialisation. Yet part of that resocialisation process involved a resensitisation to the reality of, and duty to avoid, sin. Prostitution and sexual activity outside marriage thus retained a religion-based stigma.²⁹

Though it was possible to subscribe to this view of ‘the great social evil’ without being an evangelical, and possible to be an evangelical without approving of Magdalenism, the Midnight Meeting Movement was very much an offshoot of the pan-evangelical wing of mid-century metropolitan evangelical voluntarism. Its most charismatic speaker at midnight meetings was the Revd Baptist Noel, an evangelical Churchman so voluntarist that in 1848 he converted to become a Baptist. The secretary to the movement, Theophilus Smith, had moved in the reverse direction, from Baptist to Churchman, a path eased by his role in a variety of pan-evangelical organisations, including the Protestant Association. Other key supporters were drawn from the circles of metropolitan mission organisations and reformatory homes.³⁰ Significantly for the future, rescue work was an activity impossible to carry out as a purely male project: improper motive

²⁷ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 195, citing *Midnight Mission Movement. First Annual Report* (1861), p. 45; *Magdalen's Friend*, 1 (1860), pp. 94–5, 126–7.

²⁸ *Magdalen's Friend*, 1 (1860), p. 153.

²⁹ Mason, *Victorian Sexual Attitudes*, p. 99, and see also pp. 100, 109–10, 113–14.

³⁰ For brief biographies of Noel and of Smith, see *BDEB*, pp. 830, 1029. For Noel, see also G. Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals* (Oxford, 2001), ch. 8.

was all too easy to impute. Thus, midnight meetings were quick to move, after the sermon, to informal evangelisation by ‘Christian ladies’ of their unfortunate ‘sisters in Christ’: in this way women found themselves re-entering the public arena under cover of a domesticity-promoting project.³¹

While the Midnight Meeting Movement worked in a general way to promote acceptance of the insight that ‘rescuers’ and ‘fallen’ shared spiritual citizenship, both being ‘members of a Christian community’, they were not inclined to build on that foundation any claim for the extension of citizenship in any other dimension.³² This implicitly set them at odds with the vision of community proclaimed by most (though not all) temperance campaigners of the later 1850s and 1860s.

Temperance had, since its northern, provincial, artisan/small-business origins, been a movement strongly attracted towards communitarian goals. As we have seen in chapter 4, the ‘moral suasion’ age of temperance effort had peaked by mid-century and been overlaid by demands for legal regulation of moral environments. Yet even the UKA, since its adoption of prohibition as policy in 1853, had moved quickly to legitimise its position by adopting in 1857 ‘the Permissive Bill’ as its endorsed method of obtaining its goal – the empowerment of local ratepayers to ban trade in products of addiction. This in turn required it to develop a capacity, not only to press politicians to devolve this legislative power, but a capacity to mobilise local communities to act on the permission given. The UKA, as a result, was one of two great politicising voluntary associations of Palmerstonian England (the second being the Liberation Society). In contrast to voluntary associations which mobilised to legitimate political and social privilege, the UKA mobilised to challenge it. The UKA demanded political responsiveness from a monopolising elite, and expected to benefit from ‘any extension of the franchise that shall make the registration spoon dip low enough to take up the cream of the working classes’.³³

The price which the UKA paid for this politicisation of its message was, of course, the opening of opportunity to other ‘sectarian’ forces, as well as the potential alienation of old ‘moral suasion’ temperance supporters. Given the threatened alliance between militant Dissent and working-class potential voters, therefore, it was a natural move on the cultural chessboard for Evangelical (and some Broad) Churchmen to seek to recruit their own team of players, the result being the founding of the Church of England Total Abstinence Society (later the Church of England Temperance Society (CETS)) in 1861.³⁴ There is little

³¹ *Magdalen’s Friend*, 1 (1860), 117ff. Note also the role of husband-and-wife teams in providing reclamationary ‘after-care’ once first contact had been made: Thomas, *Twenty-Five Years’ Labour*, p. 71.

³² *Magdalen’s Friend*, 1 (1860), p. 29; and cf. 2 (1862), p. 304.

³³ Harrison, *Drink*, p. 204, quoting *Alliance Weekly News*, 7 May 1859, p. 781.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 169–70; Shiman, *Crusade against Drink in Victorian England*, pp. 99–101.

reason to doubt that the predominantly southern English group of clergy who decided to rethink their attitude to teetotalism in ‘the UKA era’ were influenced by knowledge of the increasing publicity value of urban working-class participation in Church-organised activities.³⁵ Their renewed commitment to parish mission work in the aftermath of the shock results of the 1851 religious census had also helped to promote action by providing them with evidence of a market for ‘respectability-assisting cultural services’ among working-class people, so long as these services were delivered in symbolically non-condescending form.³⁶

The other major temperance initiative of the 1860s which may plausibly be interpreted as a reaction to UKA militancy was the Sunday closing movement. Bible-based sabbatarianism had (as we have seen in chapter 4) suffered a severe setback in 1855, and had thereafter to contend with a middle-class ‘rational recreation’ backlash as well as a working-class libertarian one.³⁷ Yet the ‘policy gap’ opened up at much the same moment by the UKA’s emergence as advocate of a total (but indefinitely deferred) ban on the drink trade seemed, for many respectable citizens, a scandal calling for its own remedy. The most readily negotiable compromise goal while waiting for a total victory (which not all temperance supporters wished to gain) was some kind of limit on the most conspicuous type of consumption – Sunday drinking. This was a demand which might unite temperance workers across generations and across denominational and regional boundaries as well. In practice, it was Yorkshire and Lancashire temperance workers who made the running on the issue: a first successful association in Hull in 1861 was copied in Manchester in 1866 to form the basis of a Central Association for Stopping the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors on Sundays (CASSILS). This was, yet again, a temperance organisation steered into existence by Churchmen – though in this case the social reclamation imperative outweighed the denominational (CASSILS was denominationally inclusive³⁸).

By these diverse means and others temperance activists organised their efforts to maximise opportunity for recruitment.³⁹ The duties of membership might be less personally demanding than in the era of moral suasion but, by quantitative measures of growth, temperance organisations flourished. The income of the UKA (itemised to indicate the breadth of its support base) rose sharply to reach £8,000 by 1859, and £12,500 by 1869, this without drawing income away from

³⁵ Note, e.g., the career of Canon H. J. Ellison (1813–99), foundation chairman of the society: Harrison, *Dictionary of Temperance Biography*, no. 134.

³⁶ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 116; Harrison, *Drink*, p. 170.

³⁷ For the fortunes of the LDOS and its allies in the 1860s, see Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday*, ch. 8, esp. pp. 119–20.

³⁸ Wigley, *Victorian Sunday*, pp. 172–6; Harrison, *Drink*, p. 198; Shiman, *Crusade against Drink*, pp. 87–8.

³⁹ For the significance of a growing temperance commitment via ‘bands of hope’ towards recruitment based on youth socialisation, see Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 178–80; Shiman, *Crusade*, ch. 6.

any existing temperance network (the British Temperance League possibly excepted). At the same time the UKA co-existed with (and most likely helped to stimulate) the growth of the CETS.⁴⁰ While tactical and personality tensions plagued the movement from time to time, they had little effect on its ability to project itself as a broadly based movement of ‘citizens in training’, as the quickening pace of temperance mobilisation from the mid-60s confirms.⁴¹

Meanwhile, as the debate on citizenship advanced, a third area of potential moral embarrassment began to attract attention. Concern here focused not so much on the moral calibre of existing elites, or even of future elites, as on the moral condition of state institutions. In a previous era such concern had been directed to questioning the underlying principles of state social policy itself and the result had been an updating of prison, poor law and vagrancy laws to dovetail their administration with the workings of a free market society. Yet the assumption of an (ultimately) autonomous adult agent on which modernised policy was based was always liable to produce qualms among evangelicals aware of the duty to temper justice with mercy. More practically, a generation or so after the introduction of reformed prison and workhouse regimes, it was legitimate to wonder how faithfully – how effectively – principle had been put into practice.

The first of these ‘moral reappraisal’ campaigns to gain the attention of the political classes we have already identified. This was the juvenile reformatory movement (see pp. 163–4). The reformatory movement, it will be recalled, was successful in convincing mid-century law-makers of the need to ‘make an exception’ to the moral self-responsibility principle to allow juveniles (under professional supervision) to be environmentally reclaimed. The exception had been warily conceded. For the moment it set no precedents. The question of the state’s moral responsibility for those placed in its direct power, however, remained alive, especially in cases where state concern to enforce principles of moral self-responsibility came into tension with assumptions about the ‘natural’ dependency of women and non-adults. In the course of the 1850s this sense of moral unease helped to prompt increasing concern about the life led by inmates of workhouses and, by 1858, it became strong enough to trigger the formation of a specific voluntary association – the Workhouse Visiting Society.

The chief promoter of the Workhouse Visiting Society (WVS) was a wealthy metropolitan tea merchant’s youngest daughter, Louisa Twining. It is clear that she (and indeed others in towns across the country, including Mary Carpenter’s Bristol) had been collecting experiences of workhouse conditions on private charitable visits since mid-century but, until the end of the decade, had failed to find a forum through which to exchange views.⁴² The breakthrough to

⁴⁰ Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 171, 212–14. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198–9, 237–9.

⁴² Louisa Twining, *Recollections of Life and Work* (1893), pp. 111–18; Cobbe, *Life*, i.305; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 174–5.

co-ordinated action came in 1857 when Louisa Twining became one of the first women to make use of the opportunity for publicity offered by the newly founded Social Science Association to those seeking non-politicised, non-sectarian social policy debate. Her message was that she had no quarrel with the poor law as such, but experience-based doubts that the administration of workhouses met tolerable standards of competence, honesty or justice.⁴³ Between the 1857 and 1858 meetings she was able to draw on support sufficient to convince the committee of the Social Economy Department of the association that they should ‘sanction the establishment of a Workhouse Visiting Society’. The society was officially launched in June 1858 with the goal of encouraging guardian-approved visiting of workhouses along lines once mapped out by the prison-visiting movement. The point of the visits was to identify those inmates – children, and the sick and aged in particular – who were institutionalised ‘through no fault of their own’, and to ‘exercise Christian love and exertion’ on their behalf. (In practice, this meant access to adequate nursing and charitable comforts for incurable or elderly paupers, access to training and post-release support networks for the young.⁴⁴) This programme of action exerted clear appeal on an influential circle of existing metropolitan philanthropists (chiefly Whigs and Broad Churchmen). It also attracted support from sections of the metropolitan and southern English professional middle classes.⁴⁵ Above all, it gave an outlet to pent-up mid-century community participation aspirations among upper-middle-class women. It was true that these aspirations were justified by recourse to the carefully crafted sociological construct of ‘the communion of labour’ – women working in partnership with men to achieve a more stable balance between abstract efficiency and cross-class social reconciliation than either male or female ‘principles of action’ could achieve unaided.⁴⁶ It was also true that WVS leaders were scrupulous in declaring their intention not to work without sanction from public (male) authorities (chiefly magistrates and clergy). That said, the founding of the WVS was the clearest sign possible of the intention of educated mid-Victorian women to enter the reshaped arena of public debate with firm and distinct viewpoints of their own. They not only provided the bulk of the support base (82 per cent of subscriber members in 1860, compared with 36 per cent for the Midnight Meeting Movement in 1861 and 7 per cent for the UKA in 1864), they dominated the mixed-sex executive

⁴³ Louisa Twining, ‘Workhouses’, *National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* [NAPSS]: *Transactions*, 1 (1858), pp. 571–4. The paper was in fact read on Twining’s behalf as the death of her father prevented her own attendance: *Recollections*, p. 132. She both attended and spoke in 1858 (p. 135).

⁴⁴ *NAPSS: Transactions*, 2 (1859), p. xxxi; L. Twining, ‘The Objects and Aims of the Workhouse Visiting Society’, *ibid.*, pp. 667–71.

⁴⁵ For a full committee list, see *Journal of the Workhouse Visiting Society*, 24 (March 1863). The society’s president was William Cowper MP (later Cowper-Temple).

⁴⁶ Twining, *Recollections*, p. 155; Cobbe, *Life*, i.306; and see generally Yeo, *Contest*, pp. 127–35.

of the society itself, and set the priorities of victim rescue.⁴⁷ Acting under the umbrella of the Social Science Association they created the prototype organisational form thereafter adopted to assist the foundation of other female-defined voluntary projects, notably the Ladies' National Association for the Diffusion of Sanitary Knowledge (1858) and the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (1859).⁴⁸

WVS capacity to carry out their project during the 1860s did not quite match their hopes. In spite of their skill in leaning on male authority figures, they had still failed to gain permission to work in even half of London's workhouses by 1865, and their great triumph in gaining legislation to direct the creation of separate metropolitan workhouse infirmaries in 1867 was achieved more as a result of their alliance with the medical profession than by their own unaided efforts.⁴⁹ Their insistence on using superior social rank as a weapon in their dealings with local poor law authorities no doubt had its costs as well. As a declaration of the claim on behalf of women to contribute as citizens to public policy debate, however, the society set a distinct precedent.⁵⁰

1867: reform, voluntarism and the moral duties of citizenship

In August 1867 the question of qualification for political citizenship was at last resolved by the passing of the second Reform Act. The bill which finally passed into law was, as most admitted, an improvisation. It gave the vote to more urban working-class males than many among existing elites felt comfortable with. It failed to link itself to a distribution of seats which would have reduced rural, small-town England and the Celtic fringe to the diminished representation to which its population entitled it in the House of Commons. Yet the broad basis on which reform had been argued to be justified had largely been 'moral': a man qualified himself for the vote, according to Gladstone, if he showed a character of 'self-command, self-control, respect for order, patience under suffering, confidence in the law, regard for superiors'.⁵¹ This lent a distinct tone to moral reform voluntarism in the later 1860s, which on first sight seems self-contradictory. The transformation of some of the urban working-class from objects of paternal concern to participant citizenship meant that certain ways

⁴⁷ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 233, 235, 243; Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 117, 119, 169.

⁴⁸ Twining, *Recollections*, p. 169; *NAPSS Transactions*, 2 (1859), pp. 531–2; and 3 (1860), p. xxxv.

⁴⁹ Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 119–21; *Journal of the Workhouse Visiting Society*, 32 (Jan. 1865), p. 263.

⁵⁰ Note, e.g., Twining's post-1858 list of invitations received to give evidence to public inquiries: *Recollections*, pp. 164, 181; and see Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 180–1. For examples of tensions between WVS women and 'narrow-minded' lower-status officials, see Twining, *Recollections*, p. 114; and *Journal of the WVS*, 32 (1865), p. 267.

⁵¹ Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 245.

of identifying moral problems became controversial, because too obviously patronising. On the other hand, almost all advocates of reform among educated elites had emphasised before (and continued to do so as far as seemed prudent after) 1867, that citizenship was a status linked to duties as well as rights.⁵² For this reason, certain social policy debates moved up the political agenda – most notably the debate over the state’s role in the provision of elementary education, but also debates over the rationale of certain criminal punishments and over eligibility for poor relief. But the rearrangement of agenda priorities was equally marked among moral reform elites: the rights/duties debate had its parallels in the world of volunteer action. From among the range of evidence available, three particular initiatives illustrate the galvanising effect of the belief that democracy could only stabilise if citizens became more self-disciplined. They concern the activities, in turn, of prison reformers, charity organisers and temperance activists.

The first and least hesitant of these Reform-era initiatives was the Howard Association for promoting the most efficient means of penal treatment and crime-prevention (from 1921 the Howard League). The association was forced into existence (as related by its first secretary) by the outcome of the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment (1864–6). The commission had been, to a degree, the result of lobbying by the Quaker-dominated Capital Punishment Abolition Society which traced its pedigree to the tiny society founded in 1808 and refounded in 1828 (see p. 105). The commission’s recommendation for the discontinuance of public executions (argued on the basis of abolition of a source of public demoralisation and implemented by the Gladstone government in 1868) was welcome to the Abolition Society; its decision to support retention of the death penalty was not, yet indicated the futility, for the moment, of further lobbying. In addition, the near-simultaneous abandonment of transportation as a punishment option drew attention to issues of adult prisoner reclamation, gaol management and post-release community reintegration to a degree not experienced since the era of the Prison Discipline Society.⁵³

William Tallack, the secretary to the new association launched by public meeting at Stoke Newington in November 1866, represented both continuity and adaptation in the cause. As the Quaker ex-secretary to the Capital Punishment Abolition Society since 1862, he was known to the old core of activists: Peter Bedford was his patron. Bedford, however, had died in 1864, and Tallack himself was of a Quaker generation of activists as much at home at a Social Science Association congress as in a Meeting House. The Howard Association indeed congratulated itself on its ability to attract to its committee a

⁵² Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 141–56.

⁵³ W. Tallack, *Howard Letters and Memories* (1905), pp. 138–44; and see Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 101–3.

range of theory-familiar administrators across denominational (and even party-political) boundaries: as Tallack recalled, 'From the outset, it [the committee] elected its own members, taking care to avoid men of extreme or impractical views . . . Preference was given to persons having experience as men of business or as magistrates.'⁵⁴ Early organisation, in spite of this policy, tended towards improvisation but the committee did eventually develop a stable existence between 1869 and 1871 (at which date it appointed its first permanent chairman, the Evangelical Churchman and metropolitan tea merchant, Francis Peek).⁵⁵

The goals which this new 'insider' pressure group hoped to pursue were not at first directly codified, but broadly defined as 'the promotion of the best methods of the Treatment and Prevention of Crime and Pauperism'. A Quaker sub-group of the leadership continued to 'diffuse information' on the issue of capital punishment but the association's chief early concerns centred on 'the promotion of Reformatory and Remunerative Prison Labour, such as may tend to train prisoners to earn an honest living after their discharge'. While this involved the association from time to time in libertarian defence of prisoners against arbitrary abuse of authority of a type which Dissenters of the age of Elizabeth Fry would have recognised, the association in its first decade was vastly more preoccupied with the task of actually encouraging authorities to identify and segregate prisoners into graded sub-sets of reclaimability.⁵⁶ This led them back to the old dilemma of reconciling deterrence with reformation in a regime of confinement which was 'beneficently disagreeable'. In a bifurcation typical of the 'cultural moment', however, the Howard Association resolved its dilemma by moving on the one hand to persuade magistrates and prison governors of the disciplinary and social benefit of turning prisons into training workshops for post-release gainful employment of inmates, and on the other to persuade politicians, ratepayers and police of the need to invest more in post-release surveillance. In 1869 they played (in support of the Social Science Association) an enthusiastic part in the lobbying which helped to persuade Gladstone's Home Secretary to create a separate punishment regime for repeat offenders (the Habitual Criminals Act). They were thereafter to become one of the more persistent sponsors of plans for the police-enforced denial of criminal opportunity to adult law-breakers who failed to re-enter the world of 'honest

⁵⁴ Tallack, *Howard Letters*, p. 21. For Tallack's pre-Howard Association career, see pp. 4, 48–9.

⁵⁵ For the range of backgrounds of early committee members, see *ibid.*, ch. 2; G. Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform. The Howard League and its Predecessors* (1961), pp. 17–21. Total association membership (as measured by annual subscription lists) rose from 252 in 1866–7 to 422 in 1875–6. The proportion of female contributors rose from 1:10 to 1:7 over the same period: *Howard Association. Reports*, nos. 1–10 (1867–76).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 3 (1869), [cover sheet]. Cf. no. 1 (1867), p. 10, and no. 5 (1871), p. 5.

labour'.⁵⁷ This made them natural allies of a second and ultimately much more publicly visible group of volunteer moral disciplinarians – the Charity Organisation Society (COS). Indeed, it is at first sight one of the oddities of moral reform voluntarism that there were two distinct organisations formed at all.

The Howard Association, as we have noted, declared its general goal 'the promotion of the best methods of the Treatment and Prevention of Crime and Pauperism'. The founders of the COS in their initial, experimental steps held their discussions under the banner of an Association for the Prevention of Pauperism and Crime. Both groups made regular use of the Social Science Association as a platform for publicity and for recruitment appeals. Leading figures in both organisations shared a vision of deviance repressed by detailed systems of community self-policing to compensate for the perceived erosion (and potential collapse) of 'traditional' forms of cross-class interaction. And William Tallack as representative of the Howard Association was an enthusiastic participant in the Social Science Association-sponsored meeting of 'leading social reformers' (22 June 1868) which some COS founders came to identify as the society's moment of conception.⁵⁸

In practice, however, the emergence of the COS was a complicated process, each stage of which differentiated the two bodies by goal, by membership and by method of organisation. The first phase was, predictably, the least focused. It was triggered by the call of the Unitarian minister, the Revd Henry Solly, at the meeting just mentioned for a committee of inquiry to be convened under Social Science Association patronage in order to consider ways of developing policy to 'deal with the unemployed poor of London and with its "roughs" and "criminal classes"'. Solly's chief initial concern seems to have been two-fold – to draw attention to the release in 'our very streets' of 'considerably over 100,000 criminals of all sorts' each year by a post-transportation-era prison system; and to draw attention to the 43 per cent increase in the number of metropolitan paupers relieved between December 1865 and December 1867 in the wake of the commercial crisis of 1866. He, like others, was also aware of the 'plague of beggars' which had followed the virtual collapse of the poor law revenues of London's East End parishes between 1866 and 1868.⁵⁹ His opening

⁵⁷ For the association's good relations with prison governors (some of whom sat on its early committee), see *ibid.*, no. 4 (1870), p. 6. For association contributions to the 'habitual criminal' policy debate, see no. 3 (1869), pp. 3–4; no. 5 (1871), p. 7; no. 9 (1875), p. 7; also Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 148–51.

⁵⁸ *Howard Association. Reports*, no. 2 (1868), p. 6; H. Solly, *These Eighty Years* (2 vols., 1893), ii.344.

⁵⁹ British Library of Political and Economic Science, Henry Solly papers [Solly Papers], ix.J124. For reports of the meeting of 22 June 1868, see *ibid.*, ix.J29 (*Daily Telegraph*, 25 June 1868), supplemented by *The Record*, 24 June 1868, p. 4. For full contextualisation, see M. Roberts, 'Charity Disestablished? The Origins of the Charity Organisation Society Revisited, 1868–1871', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 54 (2003), pp. 42–50.

suggestions for volunteer policy response ran the whole gamut of possibilities, from post-release community surveillance of convicts to industrial schools for at-risk juveniles to job-creation schemes and labour exchanges, as well as cross-class-assisted working men's clubs. The agenda item, however, which most attracted the attention of the more 'businesslike' of Solly's committee was 'the co-operation of charitable bodies and Poor Law authorities to prevent the scandalous waste of charitable funds that was going on',⁶⁰ and it was this specific object which fired the enthusiasm of the association's second wave of promoters.

The circumstances which had aroused the concern of this second group were overlapping but not identical with those of the initial promoters. Briefly, they were looking for a way of promoting volunteer class interaction without relying on the now secularised and democratised state, and without running the risk of discredit by the infringement of accepted principles of political economy. As an early COS dignitary summed up the dilemma: 'We should not forget that though indiscriminate charity is wrong, nevertheless charity is absolutely necessary. (Hear, hear.) . . . [N]o Christian society can exist unless there is a sphere for mutual sympathy, and mutual love, as well as justice'.⁶¹ The type of activist attracted to 'charity organisation' as a way forward from this dilemma can be readily identified from the list of participants who gathered to confirm the transformation of Solly's association into a 'Society for Organizing Charitable Relief and Reprising Mendicity' in late April 1869. While Solly was present, the actual drafting of objectives and methods of operation was entrusted to the Swedenborgian-Anglican solicitor, W. M. Wilkinson, with the costs of re-establishment being funded by the Whig Broad Churchman, Thomas Anson, second earl of Lichfield. By the time the 'provisional committee' was completed in June, the West End Broad Church takeover had been confirmed. The experience these men brought to bear on the definition of their project had been gained chiefly through participation in metropolitan '*noblesse oblige*' distress relief charities over the previous decade.⁶² The pressures which helped to crystallise their concern were closely related to their distaste at the first major achievement of the reformed parliament – the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of Ireland. The rejection of their preferred solution (and the preferred solution of bishop, from January 1869, Archbishop Tait) – concurrent endowment of all major Irish denominations – confirmed them in the view that a pre-emptive strike was needed to stabilise the community-binding functions

⁶⁰ *NAPSS Transactions*, 12 (1868), p. 373.

⁶¹ *Meeting of the Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Reprising Mendicity, Held at Willis's Rooms, On March 30th, 1870, the Earl of Derby in the Chair* (1870), p. 25 (Rev'd Dr Barry, principal of King's College London).

⁶² Charity Organisation Society [COS] Minutes of Council, vol. i, fo. 5, 29 April 1869, London Metropolitan Archives. See also Roberts, 'Charity Disestablished?', pp. 54–5.

of the National Church in England – if necessary, by repackaging these functions in non-denominational voluntary form. In this way the resource-raising enthusiasms of denominations in competition to relieve distress could be tapped without endangering the moral effectiveness as a ‘teacher of character’ of the poor law assisted by private charity.⁶³

The implementation of this vision, of course, demanded comprehensive local action and here, too, the Broad Church perspective proved formative. While the rational hope was to set out to form local committees made up of existing local government and volunteer charitable elites within each poor law unit of administration, the ‘model committees’ in practice established themselves in the London West End parishes where Whig Broad Churchmen held most influence. (The first launched itself at a conference in Marylebone court house between COS promoters and ‘representatives of the Vestry, Clergy of all denominations, the Poor Law Guardians, and the Local Charities’ in June 1869. It was chaired by the Broad Church parish incumbent, the Revd W. H. Fremantle, chaplain to Archbishop Tait and chief clerical articulator of the Whig plan for concurrent endowment in Ireland.⁶⁴)

The implications of this form of organisation and recruitment for the spread of COS activities were worked out in sometimes precarious experiment over the first six years of its operation. Broadly speaking, the elite-recruitment model of mobilisation worked well in central and west London, and very inadequately in the parts of the East End where ‘class segregation’ was most glaringly apparent. The type of activist recruited to local committees was thus biased towards peers, professional men, retired or half-pay military officers and, above all, clergy. This helped to a certain degree in ensuring respectful relations between public authorities and charity organisers. (The November 1869 ‘Goschen Minute’ of the poor law board president attempting to codify the respective roles of poor law authorities and private charity was a major step forward for the COS, though not, it appears, the result of its specific influence.)⁶⁵ But the work of persuading existing relief organisations that there was a role for an apparently parasitic, rule-bound central charity co-ordinating body proved almost as difficult to ‘sell’ in the early 1870s as it had in the era of the Mendicity Society. It was not until COS local committees developed an interest in extending charity organisation to a more sustained ‘client-monitoring’ role that a reliable way

⁶³ W. M. Wilkinson, *A Contribution towards the History of the Origin of The Charity Organisation Society* (1875), p. 15.

⁶⁴ COS Minutes of Council, vol. i, fo. 16. On Fremantle, see Roberts, pp. 56–7. For survey of pre-1868 charity organisation experiments outside London (starting with the Liverpool Central Relief Society of 1863), see Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 219.

⁶⁵ COS Minutes of Council, 23 Nov. 1869. In practice, COS-board of guardians co-operation usually required COS members to stand for election as guardians: *PP* 1874 (c. 1071), xxv.127–8, 131.

to attract permanently committed members was found. (The pioneer committee here again was Marylebone, which invited Octavia Hill to take up the task of training middle-class volunteers to semi-professional standards of 'social work'.⁶⁶) And not until the appointment of the redoubtable C. S. Loch as secretary in 1875 did W. M. Wilkinson's claim for the COS to be recognised 'as if it were a Department of State' approach the edge of plausibility.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, certain members of the Gladstone government of 1868–74 were convincing themselves of the need to rework the criteria of responsible citizenship by use of the powers of actual departments of state. A first example of this 'disciplinary liberalism' has already been glimpsed as it cut across the path of the emerging COS: this was the Goschen Minute of 1869. A year later, the 1870 Education Act articulated the state's insistence that a precondition of 'democratic citizenship' was the provision (soon to be made compulsory) of basic formal education. In both these cases a role remained for volunteer social action: it is credible to argue in fact that the state moved in the hope that a clear declaration of policy would stimulate rather than deter volunteer effort.⁶⁸ In one area of policy adjustment, however, government hope of fruitful co-operation between public and volunteer forces went badly wrong. The point of policy clash was the licensing laws.

As was predictable, temperance activists in general, the UKA in particular, had expectations raised by the coming of democracy. At last parliament would be free to legislate in the public interest, released from manipulation by vested interest groups such as the drink trade.⁶⁹ Reception of the UKA's 'permissive bill' introduced into the reformed House of Commons in 1869 seemed to indicate the effect of the new voters on political elites and the 1870 version was rejected there by only thirty-one votes. Given this apparently rising surge of public opinion, Gladstone's Home Secretary, H. A. Bruce, determined to harness the moment to his own purposes.⁷⁰ His bill, introduced in 1871, brought all liquor outlets under magistrate control; in addition, it sought to reward prohibitionists for their support by empowering ratepayers (by a three-fifths majority) to impose full Sunday closing and a drastic reduction in the number of licensed premises in their local government area. The bill impressed all those whose

⁶⁶ *PP* 1874 (c. 1071), xxv.126–31; G. Darley, *Octavia Hill* (1990), pp. 120–8. The extension of work to client-monitoring was entangled with the vexed issue of whether the COS should itself become a fund-raiser and relief distributor. In spite of central council doubts, the operational logic of the situation soon ensured that it *did* become so: C. B. P. Bosanquet, *The History and Mode of Operation of the Charity Organisation Society* (1874), p. 9; and for provincial developments, see R. Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England* (1995), chs. 5–6.

⁶⁷ Wilkinson, *Contribution*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, pp. 87, 91–2; J. Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 8–9.

⁶⁹ Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, p. 172; Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 239–40.

⁷⁰ Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 243–5 (and see p. 251 for Bruce's presentation of the 1871 bill as 'a necessary supplement to the Education bill' of the previous year).

primary concern was the over-commercialisation of working-class leisure and the problems of poverty and public order which resulted. Whig and Tory MPs on balance welcomed the bill, as did ‘moderate’ temperance organisations. The UKA, however (with few exceptions), did not. Disgusted by the provisions for compensation of non-renewed licences, and convinced that the local option was itself a compromise falling well short of trade prohibition, a majority of UKA leaders effectively left Bruce ‘in the lurch’ (as one ‘moderate’ temperance leader expressed it). Debate thereafter veered to focus on the property rights and English liberties implications of the stricter licensee-policing provisions which the bill also contained. This phase of debate proved a triumph for ‘the drink interest’ and the bill was withdrawn. The modified bill which Bruce did manage to rescue from the ruins in 1872 no longer contained the ratepayer-initiated licence reduction provisions and restricted itself to the ‘culture-control’ goals of stricter police surveillance of licence conditions in combination with heavier fines for public drunkenness.⁷¹

The question of who had betrayed whom became an issue canvassed in a range of constituencies, especially in south Lancashire and the west midlands. The outcome (to be examined more closely in the final part of this chapter) was a resurgence of UKA militancy which its leaders resolved to channel in ways not used since the time of the Anti-Corn Law League. From September 1872, on the motion of its chief parliamentary spokesman, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the UKA pledged itself to support only candidates ‘favourable to the Permissive Bill’ and, if none were available, to sponsor their own candidate. This declaration conjured up an unprecedented flow of funding for the task but also confirmed a continuing polarisation of party commitment, first begun in 1871, linking the drink trade to the Conservative Party and leaving the UKA with only one workable option – the capture of a distinctly nervous Liberal Party.⁷²

Backlash: the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts and the reassertion of moral individualism

As all this evidence demonstrates, the campaign to guide new citizens to a habitually raised level of moral responsibility was not short of recruits. For a complete picture of 1870s moral reform adjustment, however, it becomes increasingly vital to record the ways in which the experience of ‘1867’ left some moral reformers ambivalent about, even repelled by, the powers of state-assisted coercion some of them had helped to summon into existence. For them,

⁷¹ A. E. Dingle, *The Campaign for Prohibition in Victorian England* (1980), pp. 28–30, 37–8; Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 240–1, 248, 251–4.

⁷² UKA income rose from £13,985 in 1871 to £22,987 in 1872: Dingle, *The Campaign for Prohibition*, pp. 41, 192. This secured it respect among other moral reform associations as the most effective support-raising organisation of its era: P. McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (1980), p. 252.

a reinvigoration of state power signalled not opportunity but threat. Some of this was a recycling of libertarian theories of character-formation still widespread among liberty-loving Englishmen. As Bishop Magee summed it up during debate on the 1872 licensing bill:

[I]f I must take my choice . . . whether England should be free or sober . . . I should say it would be better that England should be free than that England should be compulsorily sober. I would distinctly prefer freedom to sobriety, because with freedom we might in the end attain sobriety; but in the other alternative we should eventually lose both freedom and sobriety.⁷³

Reactions became even more polarised when it became assumed that state-endorsed interference with moral self-education was being promoted by hitherto morally sensitive but now dangerously materialistic professional elites dependent on state power for their authority. Claims of exclusive competence to judge made by ‘aristocratic doctors’ on behalf of the Contagious Diseases Acts were (according to Josephine Butler, again in 1872) ‘calculated to make the medical profession . . . “stink in the nostrils of the moral and religious people of England”’⁷⁴. Most powerfully of all, moral reformers who believed themselves to have been marginalised by the half-democratic reforms of 1867 made desperate attempts to warn against the dangers of the morally insensitive use of state power by a supposedly relegitimated executive government.⁷⁵

On a narrow political front such reactions helped both to fragment sections of Gladstone’s electoral support base and to feed the beginnings of the urban electoral realignment which assisted Disraeli to government in 1874. On a wider cultural front, this battle to reappraise the moral role of the state was to generate a range of volunteer responses. At the heart of most of them was a sense of deep alarm among a diverse range of middle-class women about the implications of their formal exclusion from political decision-making.

The most ‘notorious’ of such feminist protests against the moral bias of the reformed political system was the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, begun at the 1869 Social Science Association congress in Bristol. This was indeed a hinge event. Previous congresses had been reliably used as recruitment grounds for a Chadwick-style pressure group to campaign for the extension of the Acts. (The Association for the Prevention of Contagious Venereal Diseases – or Extension Association – had been launched in 1867 as a lobby group of medical practitioners and local community leaders organised to persuade central government of the sanitary and moral benefits to be gained from

⁷³ Harrison, *Drink*, p. 287.

⁷⁴ Josephine Butler to Dr W. Carter, 21 Feb. 1872, quoted in McHugh, *Prostitution*, p. 249.

⁷⁵ ‘A time such as this, when the people imagine that they are the controlling force of Government has many and peculiar dangers of its own. By feeling too secure of our liberties, we may lose them. Tyranny and injustice are not dead, they have only put on new forms more suited to the changing age’: *Association for the Defence of Personal Rights. Report of the Committee for Amending the Law wherein it is Injurious to Women* (Manchester, 1871), p. 15.

extension of a regime of compulsory venereal disease inspection of ‘reputed prostitutes’ from ‘garrison towns, to the other parts of the kingdom’.⁷⁶ The initial experiments in ‘sanitary police’ on which they relied had been authorised with minimal debate by Acts of 1864 and 1866.)

By 1869, however, the forces of state-enforced professional expertise, triumphant on other fronts, were starting to realise that opinion on the CD Acts was no longer controllable by insider elites. It was an indication of their initial complacency that the first constituency to mobilise against them had apparently only been aroused to awareness of the methods of operation of the Acts of 1864 and 1866 by an attempt of the Extension Association’s secretary (Berkeley Hill) to recruit the secretary of the Rescue Society (Daniel Cooper) to the cause. Cooper’s denunciation of the Acts in the society’s report for 1868 was followed by a deputation to the Home Office and the drafting of a memorandum to the Home Secretary on behalf of ‘Committees of the Metropolitan Institutions for the Reclamation of Fallen Women’: the memorandum deplored any attempt to adopt a ‘continental’ approach to the regulation of prostitutes on grounds both of religion and of legal principle.⁷⁷

The evangelical publicity campaign which followed was insufficient to deter the passing of legislation extending the areas subject to the Acts around garrison towns in August 1869, but it was sufficient to ensure maximum interest in the issue at the annual meeting of the Social Science Association in October 1869. It was here that the medico-legal extensionists suffered their second failure to contain debate. In spite of their precautions to exclude women from the key forum, the vote taken at the end of discussions called on the association ‘to record a protest against the secret legislation’ by a majority of two to one. The resolution had been moved by an ex-president of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, and seconded by Professor F. W. Newman acting as mouthpiece for ‘ladies personally unknown to him’ who viewed CD Act extension ‘with horror and indignation’. On the following day the protestors and their (male) supporters met to launch a National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and a committee of Anglican and Nonconformist clergy was elected, in alliance with two sympathetic medical men, a local Quaker businessman to act as treasurer, and a Nottingham bookseller as secretary.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, a network of provincial feminist activists was also sounding out opinion at the Social Science Meeting and further afield, the most public result being the publication in the London *Daily News* on New Year’s Day, 1870, of a ‘Ladies’ Protest’

⁷⁶ *NAPSS: Transactions*, 11 (1868), p. xli. For the origins and activities of the ‘Association for the Prevention of Contagious Venereal Diseases’ [CD Acts Extension Association], see McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 44–5; Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 79–85.

⁷⁷ Benjamin Scott, *A State Iniquity: Its Rise, Extension, and Overthrow* (1890; reprinted New York, 1968), pp. 83–6.

⁷⁸ For the Social Science Association debate, see *NAPSS: Transactions*, 13 (1870), pp. 444–51; Scott, *A State Iniquity*, pp. 89–92. For the launch of the National Association for Repeal, see *ibid.*, pp. 92–4.

against the Acts signed by 124 well-known feminists and female members of the Society of Friends.⁷⁹

As a result of this early separation of mobilisation plans along gender lines the CD Acts repeal movement became an unusually complex set of volunteer organisations with implications for the success of the cause which still remain open to debate. Broadly speaking, there were three networks of activists, each with its distinctive recruitment profile, rationale for action and preferred method of operation. The 'National' organisation founded at Bristol in 1869 was the 'senior branch' of the movement in the sense that it began operations first and operated in closest contact with parliamentary elites. (It transferred its headquarters to London in 1870, merging with a Metropolitan Association to become the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (NARCDAs).) Its executive quickly recruited from a circle of advanced metropolitan Liberals of Unitarian background, to whom was added a sprinkling of Rescue Society and Midnight Meeting Movement Evangelicals. Several members of this executive were married couples. William Shaen, the Unitarian solicitor (last noted as a young recruit to the Associate Institute in the mid-1840s), acted as chairman, presiding over a committee dominated by barristers and other metropolitan professionals.⁸⁰ The intellectual basis of their motives for commitment followed the arguments of J. S. Mill (a NARCDAs vice-president): state-certified prostitution was to be deplored both as an infringement of the civil liberties of women and as an incitement to moral irresponsibility among men. The goal of law repeal was intelligible to anyone brought up in the traditions of radical Liberalism and the association was a financial success from a very early stage.⁸¹

Yet the National Association had far less credibility as a nationwide pressure-group than its buoyant income would suggest. As the failure of the association to bring about quick repeal by insider methods of persuasion became apparent in 1870–1 the initiative passed increasingly to two other repeal networks – the Ladies' National Association (LNA), founded in 1869 in Bristol, and the various midlands and northern electoral leagues for repeal. (The most notable of these was H. J. Wilson's Northern Counties League for Repeal, founded at Sheffield in the aftermath of a promising by-election foray by the LNA at Pontefract in August 1872.⁸²) Both of these networks were driven by a sense of outrage at state

⁷⁹ Scott, *A State Iniquity*, pp. 101–4; Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, p. 93.

⁸⁰ For recollection of the corporate character of the NARCDAs executive by an ex-member, see *Elizabeth Malleson 1828–1916: Autobiographical Notes and Letters. With a Memoir by Hope Malleson* (1926), pp. 122–6. For exhaustive modern prosopographical evaluation, see McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 71–2.

⁸¹ For Mill on the necessity for repeal, see *The Shield*, 1871, p. 429; McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 63–4. NARCDAs income from subscriptions and donations (which, with Quaker help, rose from £1,091 in 1870–1 to a peak of £3,147 in 1874–5) is tabulated and analysed in *ibid.*, pp. 74, 88 (n. 87), 279.

⁸² McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 84, 91–2.

endorsement of ‘sin’ which the National Association found it difficult to match. A major source of this sense of outrage is traceable to a shared sense of exclusion and distrust felt by provincial Nonconformists for a ‘corrupt’ aristocratic elite not yet dislodged from government. The LNA was run for its first decade from Liverpool and Bristol with its executive overwhelmingly Quaker-Protestant Nonconformist in religious allegiance.⁸³ The Northern Counties League was an offshoot of West Riding Nonconformist Liberal radicalism. Neither group was prepared to give the post-1867 ‘Whig Liberal establishment’ the benefit of the doubt on moral issues, the renegade Whig-Anglican, Josephine Butler, who articulated the public views of the LNA, tersely declaring in 1870 that ‘Rulers require from time to time to be rebaptised in first principles.’ There was, however, a certain degree of ambiguity in defining what those first principles might be. For male provincial Nonconformists, police action against street prostitutes might be a perfectly desirable enforcement of God’s laws at the same time as such action enraged the strongly feminist leaders (though possibly not followers) of the LNA for its oppression in criminalising victim rather than client.⁸⁴ For this reason (among others more tactical) some key LNA members took the further step towards ideological self-protection of founding, in 1871, a Committee for Amending the Law in Points wherein it is Injurious to Women – an organisation shortly afterwards renamed the Vigilance Association for the Defence of Personal Rights. It was in this small association of radical northern feminists (female and male) that the defensive political philosophy of human rights constitutionally entrenched beyond the reach of political alteration was canvassed. This legalistic approach to the protection of women from state interference with their status as free agents kept open lines of co-operation with metropolitan non-evangelical repeal campaigners which might otherwise have withered.⁸⁵

Yet, overall, it was the crusading instincts of the populist anti-metropolitan alliance which fuelled the repeal cause in the period between the collapse of the ‘insider’ approach in 1872 and the collapse of the Gladstone government itself at the general election of 1874. These were the years in which feminists and Nonconformist provincial patriarchs alike could take heart from the response they were able to arouse among the new electorate to the call on behalf of victimised women – the daughters of the people. By 1873 Mrs Butler, only three years earlier a nervous preacher to the railway workers of Crewe, was being invited to address the ‘parliament of organised labour’ itself – the newly

⁸³ Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 113, 122. For LNA income (comparable in size to that of NARCD but drawn from a wider recruitment base of more than 800 members), see McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 175–6, 279.

⁸⁴ For Butler quotation see *The Shield*, 28 March 1870, cited in B. Harrison, ‘State Intervention and Moral Reform’, in Hollis, *Pressure from Without*, p. 314. Tensions between male and female perceptions of ‘underlying principle’ are analysed in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 137–41.

⁸⁵ M. Roberts, ‘Feminism and the State in Later Victorian Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 89–90.

founded Trades Union Congress.⁸⁶ The fall of the only government likely to heed provincial Nonconformist sensibilities – Gladstone’s – in the following year rather thwarted the exploitation of this new reservoir of support for the cause, but it remained the hope of repealers that their goal was one which could only gain support as electoral trends ‘ripened’. In the meantime, they could console themselves with the sudden appearance of a new leader – James Stansfeld – released from government office to stand beside the Unitarian friend of his youth, William Shaen. The new foci of attention which Stansfeld encouraged – the rescue of prostitutes and the resocialisation of males to a raised standard of sexual self-control – were to prove projects of divisive medium-term effect on the moral reform cause.⁸⁷ For the short term, however, there seemed little else usefully to be done.

Meanwhile, on another flank of the post-1867 army of moral resistance, yet another challenge to state-assisted moral arrogance was being mounted. The victims were animals, not prostitutes; the identified oppressors were, however, to a significant extent the same. The new focus of outrage was the practice of animal vivisection in medical research.⁸⁸ As with CD Acts repeal, there was a prehistory of unease which erupted into organised form only after the coming of male democracy. As with CD Acts repeal, it took several acts of symbolic provocation to create the conditions under which publicity might ignite co-ordinated response.

The prehistory of the antivivisection movement is, in large part, a history of policy debate within the RSPCA. Unease about the practice of experimentation on animals for ‘respectable’ professional purposes was in fact as old as the RSPCA itself. Yet the society, in spite of sporadic outbursts of concern, had remained effectively tongue-tied on the issue until the late 1860s. On the one hand, its discourses of barbarous human behaviour reclaimed by domestication of the emotions significantly raised the level of duty owed to animals, and to ‘trusting’ domestic animals by middle-class males most of all. On the other hand, its pursuit of public acceptance through cultural moderation inclined its leaders to avoid confrontation with the socially respectable, be they field-sport

⁸⁶ Josephine Butler, *An Autobiographical Memoir* (3rd edn, 1928), p. 70. Cf. McHugh, *Prostitution*, p. 113.

⁸⁷ For rescue work, see Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 97, 132–3. For the founding of the Social Purity Society, launched by Shaen, Butler and others as a male re-education project to complement CD Acts repeal efforts, see *National Society for the Promotion of Social Purity. Laws and Operations of the Society, Address and First Report of the Committee* (1875), pp. 33ff. For an earlier, apparently stalled, attempt by Shaen and G. C. W. Warr, see *National Association for the Promotion of Social Purity* (1870).

⁸⁸ A third significant area of 1870s revolt against state-assisted medical ‘tyranny’, not investigated here, is the campaign against compulsory child vaccination: see D. and R. Porter, ‘The Politics of Prevention: Antivaccinationism and Public Health in 19th-Century England’, *Medical History*, 32 (1988), pp. 231–52.

aristocrats or knowledge-seeking medical professionals.⁸⁹ In 1874, however, the RSPCA faced a challenge it could not avoid accepting: on information gained from distinguished medical men themselves, the society found itself bringing charges of animal cruelty against surgeons participating in the dissection of a live dog injected with absinthe at the annual conference of the British Medical Association in Norwich. The case was lost on a technicality but the incident allowed the RSPCA committee to claim to have acted ‘in opposition to the wishes of a powerful and learned profession . . . without faltering’.⁹⁰ The clamour that followed propelled the RSPCA into a series of opinion-co-ordinating activities which (with Queen Victoria’s private assistance) led in the following year to a royal commission on vivisection designed by the Disraeli government to defuse the issue. Instead, overenthusiastic lobbying by elements in the medical profession brought about a redesign of compromise government legislation devised to license animal experimenters and to restrict their activities within publicly acceptable limits. In spite of the best efforts of the RSPCA to present the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876 as a useful first step to effective regulation, the flood-gates now burst as they had done in 1869 after the extension of the CD Acts, and for much the same underlying reasons.⁹¹ As one recent historian of the anti-vivisection movement has usefully summed it up: ‘The CD Acts and vivisection alike ruptured the causal connections between sin and disease in ways which many Victorians found profoundly disturbing’.⁹²

The aspect of physiological research which froze the blood of its opponents was the apparent moral ease with which ‘professionals’ reduced their task to a measure of material outcomes. This not only denied the right of the victim to recognition of the suffering inflicted but, above all, as it was insisted, brutalised the moral character of the inflicter of the suffering.

We stand face to face with a *New Vice* . . . the Vice of Scientific Cruelty . . . It is not like most other human vices, hot and thoughtless. The man possessed by it is calm, cool, deliberate; perfectly cognisant of what he is doing; understanding, as indeed no other man understands, the full meaning and extent of the waves and spasms of agony he deliberately creates. It does not seize the ignorant or hunger-driven or brutalized classes; but the cultivated, the well-fed, the well-dressed, the civilized.⁹³

⁸⁹ R. French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 27–35; H. Kean, *Animal Rights. Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800* (1998), ch. 4. It should be noted that RSPCA respectability was much reinforced from the early 1860s by an expansion drive under the management of Charles Colam (secretary 1861–1905): *RSPCA Reports*, no. 39 (1865), p. 27.

⁹⁰ *RSPCA Reports*, no. 50 (1876), p. 29; and see French, *Antivivisection*, ch. 3.

⁹¹ For full analysis, see French, *Antivivisection*, chs. 4–5. For RSPCA reaction to the Act, see *Reports*, no. 50 (1876), pp. 32–4.

⁹² M. A. Elston, ‘Women and Anti-Vivisection’, in N. Rupke (ed.), *Vivisection in Historical Perspective* (1987), pp. 274–5. Cf. French, *Antivivisection*, p. 367.

⁹³ Cobbe, *Life*, ii.290. See also the influential statement of the same case made by Dr George Hoggan in a letter to the *Morning Post*, 2 Feb. 1875, reprinted in French, *Antivivisection*, pp. 414–15.

This implacable distrust of professionals had taken time to emerge. But, by late 1875, Frances Power Cobbe, the author of this passage and chief publicist of the vivisection-regulation campaign, was starting to lose faith in polite methods of protest. Though she claimed later to be one who ‘abhorred Societies’ for ‘the huge additional labour’ involved, she now came to accept the advice of her medical confidant, George Hoggan, that the moment had come to institutionalise the circle of ‘eminent men’ on whom she had relied for ‘counsel’ to that point. If the medical profession was now actively competing for the ear of the Home Secretary then animals needed their own defenders, and the RSPCA under its prudent secretary John Colam had proved a compromised agent. A preliminary ‘Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection’ was duly launched on 2 December 1875 at the West End house of Dr Hoggan with the goal of restricting rather than prohibiting vivisection. Hoggan and Cobbe became its joint secretaries.⁹⁴

Then, as the success of the medical lobby in evading restriction became apparent on enactment of the Cruelty to Animals bill in August 1876, a monitoring project transformed itself into a crusade. Enraged by high political betrayal, Cobbe moved from tactical to symbolic goals, now announcing to the press that outright prohibition was the only effective way of dealing with the problem. Cobbe’s chief political ‘counsel’, Lord Shaftesbury, after dutifully pointing out the benefits of continuing to work in co-operation with government, nonetheless concluded that ‘[y]ou are quite justified in your determination to agitate the country’.⁹⁵ By 1878, Cobbe’s society (now coming to be identified by its address as ‘the Victoria Street Society’) had effectively purged itself of members unwilling to commit themselves to total legislative prohibition.⁹⁶

Who were these implacables? To a certain point it was possible to identify them as another incarnation of the alleged ‘shrieking sisterhood’ who continued to channel their energies into the CD Acts repeal campaign. There was significant support among radical libertarian feminists for ‘medical reform’ causes including anti-vivisection: Cobbe had first met her key medical informant, Dr George Hoggan, at the house of the venerable metropolitan women’s rights pioneer, Barbara Bodichon.⁹⁷ Further links may be deduced from the willingness of prominent male feminists to accept office in the Victoria Street Society. (James Stansfeld chaired the society’s first executive committee meeting, and William Shaen was welcomed to the committee both for his legal skills and his Unitarian contacts.) The society itself operated from foundation under mixed-sex management.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Cobbe, *Life*, ii.270–2. ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 280–3: Shaftesbury to Cobbe, 16 Aug. 1876.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 288. ⁹⁷ Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 126–7.

⁹⁸ For a list of foundation executive committee members (ten men, six women), see *Statement of the Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection* (1876), p. 2. For Cobbe’s account of their interaction, see Cobbe, *Life*, ii.272, 305.

On the other hand, it would be a distinct distortion of the record to leave an impression of the anti-vivisection movement as a mere variant version of post-1867 radical libertarianism. Like the CD Act repeal campaigners, anti-vivisectionists claimed to be defending the rights of the vulnerable against the insensitivity of arrogant elites. Unlike them, however, they could not claim to be preparing to abolish victimhood by extending citizenship. The ‘daughters of the people’ under threat of forced examination for venereal disease were the daughters of potential voters if not potential voters themselves; animals would always need to have human protectors. For this reason the symbolism of the anti-vivisection cause was always as accessible to paternalists, Conservatives and home-counties Churchmen as it was to radical libertarians, Liberals and provincial Nonconformists. This was a cause for which the ‘heretical’ Unitarian theist, Miss Cobbe, was able to recruit the active support of the Tory Evangelical, Lord Shaftesbury – once reassurance had been obtained from the Broad Church Lady Mount-Temple sufficient to overcome her distaste for what she had until then perceived as his ‘Calvinistic bigotry’.⁹⁹

In this way, as we now deduce, a new complexity had entered the world of middle-class moral reform by the end of the 1870s. From one perspective the coming of democracy had encouraged activists to associate with the state to give ‘moral subsidy’ to the formation of the character of immature or morally vulnerable citizens. From another perspective, this very process could be interpreted as a threat to the moral growth of the individual. Whether the way out of this dilemma was even greater exposure to the learning process of moral self-management (as J. S. Mill insisted) or more sensitive stewardship of their power and expertise by the professional middle classes (as Frances Power Cobbe argued), was a matter yet to be resolved. A study of the way in which the principal moral reform elites had themselves weathered this period of restructuring in public authority may, nonetheless, give some clues to likely approaches.

Privilege vindicated, privilege challenged: moral reform leaders in the age of Josephine Butler

If Wilberforce had died in a state of gratitude for the moral fruits of the Reform Act of 1832 (see p. 171 above), it was the fate of his Evangelical successor, Shaftesbury, to live on long into an age for which he had little sympathy and less hope. The Palmerston years had produced their own crop of anxieties but the 1865 death of the old Prime Minister (the ‘ultimus Romanorum’ in Shaftesbury’s summing up) prepared the way for far worse. By 1868, with a Reform Act passed and Gladstonian Liberalism in full cry, it sometimes seemed

⁹⁹ Cobbe, *Life*, ii.187–8.

to him that the last days were indeed unfolding. His prediction, made on the occasion of the departure of his co-worker, 'Rob Roy' MacGregor, for the Holy Land, read as follows:

If your absence be prolonged for two years or so, possibly less, you will, on your return, find every institution in the dust. Not only the Church and the Peerage will be . . . abolished . . . but all Society will be in a new phase of thought feeling and opinion . . . 'Come Lord Jesus' should be the prayer of everyone at every minute. May God be with you!¹⁰⁰

MacGregor was also advised to 'Go forward, neither asking, nor wishing, for "Evangelical" support – The party is extinct, and very nearly, the sentiments.' This double declaration of despair in the face of 'democracy' and biblical 'neology' was partly a matter of temperament – Shaftesbury's mood swings are even more apparent in his diary entries than in his correspondence – but also an admission of inability to keep pace with intellectual and institutional restructuring. Shaftesbury, unlike one strand in later Victorian Evangelicalism, never withdrew from the world to a controllable community of private worshippers. In fact, he continued to act on the belief that God had called him to 'devote whatever advantages He might have bestowed on [him] to the cause of the weak, the helpless, both man and beast, and those who had no one to help them'.¹⁰¹ In pursuit of this belief he continued to collect volunteer responsibilities: he was, as has been seen, an active anti-vivisectionist from 1875 onwards, and gave willing support to the work of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children on its foundation in 1884, just a year before his death. But the fear that his interventions were 'a feeble "light shining in a dark place" . . . altogether useless in the actual emergency'¹⁰² was a recurring thought. Moreover, key public policy shifts which he nominally supported he privately confessed 'will greatly abridge my labours, but . . . will half break my heart'. Yet there was no way of resisting, for others now claimed more convincingly than he to have the authority and expertise to advise and act.¹⁰³

Not all Evangelicals remained as despondent as Shaftesbury. It was certainly true, as Shaftesbury had perceived, that Church Evangelicals were increasingly on the defensive by the 1870s. That was the penalty they paid for remaining theologically committed; a worrying amount of effort now needed to be

¹⁰⁰ Shaftesbury to John MacGregor, 9 Sept. 1868, MacGregor papers, London Metropolitan Archives, F/MM 1–85.

¹⁰¹ Shaftesbury to Frances Power Cobbe, 14 April 1880, quoted in Finlayson, *Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, p. 601.

¹⁰² Shaftesbury to MacGregor (see note 100 above), though note the characteristic phrase of Evangelical caution which follows: '(which, however, we must not despise)'.

¹⁰³ Finlayson, *Shaftesbury*, pp. 490–1.

directed towards the preservation of the hitherto assumed heritage of Bible-based Protestantism now under attack from Broad Church intellectuals and liturgical ‘Romanisers’ within the National Church itself. Nor was this the only battle-front: the coming of democracy seemed to favour militant Nonconformist campaigns against the ‘monopoly’ privileges of the Established Church at precisely the moment when Church Evangelicals, at last entrenched within the Church hierarchy by the favour of Palmerston, felt more strongly than in the past that they might have something to lose. Church defence efforts, therefore, deflected much Evangelical energy.

There were, nonetheless, some growth points in the appeal of Establishment Evangelicalism which younger moral reform activists were well placed to exploit when they had the energy. Two of the more notably energetic were Shaftesbury’s protégé of the 1840s, ‘Rob Roy’ MacGregor (1825–92), and a newcomer ‘gentleman businessman’, Francis Peek (?–1899). We last met MacGregor as founder of the Pure Literature Society during the early 1850s (see p. 169). It was clear at that stage that he had a gift for publicity: its full extent had yet to be demonstrated. On the evidence to hand at that earlier stage, MacGregor seemed to classify himself as a ‘*noblesse oblige*’ amateur, as likely as Shaftesbury to be pushed aside by secularising professionals. His following experiment (1860–8) in moral reclamation of working-class males through volunteer military training seems to confirm a hankering after a simpler, more ‘feudal’ world. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that, the more eccentrically chivalrous his activities became, the more public attention he received. He was aware of this fact.

The exploit which confirmed MacGregor’s status, not just as an evangeliser but as a celebrity, was a solo canoe trip which he made down the River Jordan in 1869. (This was the occasion for Shaftesbury’s doom-laden letter, quoted at p. 222 above.) MacGregor’s qualms about the contrast between the ‘dangerous luxury’ of his own sporting enjoyments and the duty of ‘true Christian soldiers’ to ‘do battle with . . . vice, sadness, pain, and poverty’ were undoubtedly sincerely expressed, but relatively easily suppressed on realisation of the amount of public credit which such glamorous, press-amplified activity gained for him among the key social groups whose sense of moral obligation he wished to arouse – public school boys and urban working-class males.¹⁰⁴ In 1870 he was able to cash in some of that credit by standing successfully for election to the first London School Board. Some who came within his sphere of authority as chairman of the Board’s Industrial Schools committee found his ‘militarisation’ of the system under his control a cause for alarm.¹⁰⁵ He stood, nonetheless, for

¹⁰⁴ Hodder, *MacGregor*, pp. 284, 346–7ff. ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 380–2.

one route of Evangelical adaptation towards a mass-consumption, democratised future at home and an empire-conscious future abroad.

Francis Peek (Frank to his fellow London School Board member, John MacGregor) could hardly have matched this self-presentation of moral reformer as public celebrity – nor would it have pleased him to try. Yet he too represents a distinctive Evangelical voice in post-1867 moral reform adaptation – the voice of new-money urban Evangelicalism to blend with the voice of aristocratic *noblesse oblige*. Described by *The Times* at his death in 1899 as ‘one of the best type of London citizens’, Peek gained his reputation during the 1860s and 70s as a result of his unusually large donations to moral reform causes. Suburban church-building was his most widely publicised voluntary activity but, behind the scenes, he was also a major supporter of the ‘victim-assisting’ branch of moral reform by his donations to the Rescue Society and the Vigilance Association, a role which he was to formalise in the 1880s by becoming foundation treasurer of the National Vigilance Association. His role in moral reform was by no means limited to the writing of cheques, however. As became apparent during the years after 1867, his central preoccupation was to vindicate the continued existence of hierarchy in a democratising age by encouraging ‘men of education and judgment’ to commit themselves to personal performance of public duty in the restructured world of local urban administration and politics.¹⁰⁶ Peek’s own sacrifice of time and skill in the cause led him in turn by the early 1870s to the committees of the Howard Association, of the COS and, most strenuous of all, to the role of defender of the interests of religion (and of the Established Church in particular) as a member of the first London School Board. Like MacGregor, he accepted that new times required new methods of self-projection. Unlike MacGregor, he came from no direct line of descent of those accustomed to command.¹⁰⁷

Peek’s concern to reforge the links of urban community was a concern easily understood by a wide range of Churchmen and women of the 1860s and 70s, not all of them Evangelicals. As we have noted, the era of volunteer associational experiment of the later 1860s was heavily influenced by a general wave of anxiety about the effects of urban class segregation. If hierarchy was to continue to be respected in an age of democracy, it was important that the privileged and educated show a sense of concern for other classes. It was also important that they show it in a disciplined and informed way. An ‘urban gentry’, it was argued, needed to be deployed in order to give leadership to communities otherwise liable to ‘demoralisation’.¹⁰⁸ This line of argument was particularly appealing to Broad Churchmen and women anxious to revalidate the credentials

¹⁰⁶ F. Peek, *Our Laws and our Poor* (1875), p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ Tallack, *Howard Letters*, pp. 25–32. See also obituary in *The Times*, 15 Sept. 1899, pp. 4f.

¹⁰⁸ G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Harmondsworth, 1976), ch. 13.

of the Church of England both as the church of the nation and of the local community. Its promoters included a variety of moral reform leaders, among them the founding secretary of the Workhouse Visiting Society, Louisa Twining, and the first salaried secretary of the Charity Organisation Society, Charles Bosanquet.

Louisa Twining (1820–1912), as noted earlier, was the young, unmarried daughter of Thomas Twining, tea merchant and metropolitan philanthropist, when she took her cause before the Social Science Association in 1857. Her interest in the aged and incurable parish poor had begun, traditionally enough, as an extension of her sense of responsibility for aged servants, a sense of responsibility deepened on the unexpected death of two of her brothers into a sense of shared human suffering. The fact that these brothers had been pupils of the founding father of nineteenth-century Broad Churchmanship, Dr Arnold of Rugby, was, however, also significant, as was her continuing friendship with the doctor's most influential memorialist, Thomas Hughes. In 1855, faced with an example of oppression of the weak in the Strand workhouse, she was provoked to action. Unable to convince the board of guardians to dismiss an uneducated and 'insolent' workhouse master for conducting a 'reign of terror' against the inmates, she turned to the press and to the Social Science Association.¹⁰⁹

She had chosen her moment well. On the one hand, her radicalisation coincided with the appointment of A. C. Tait as bishop of London (1856). (Tait had been Arnold's successor as headmaster of Rugby.) Her vision of privilege earned by discharge of community duty coincided neatly with Tait's, and 'the cordial sympathy I always met with from both the Bishop and Mrs Tait' opened a range of opportunities for practical action.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, the newly founded Social Science Association gave her a platform from which to contribute to public policy debate – a platform which she used with persistence and skill. Like her contemporaries, Florence Nightingale and Mary Carpenter, she gained a respectful hearing by taking pains to stress the need for women not to compete with men but to professionalise their unique competences. The extent to which the doctrine of 'separate but equal' led her to seek direct political representation for women became apparent in the early 1870s when she declined nomination to her local board of guardians and to the first elected London School Board but welcomed the participation of other women.¹¹¹ By this approach she helped to retrieve some of the ground lost by women accused of undisciplined sentimentality in the prison discipline and antislavery era.

If professionalisers like Louisa Twining helped to reposition women among moral reformers, the male equivalents of the era also had their reasons to seek

¹⁰⁹ Twining, *Recollections*, pp. 24, 111, 113–18, 132. ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹¹¹ As she summed up her position in later life, 'if women are to be employed in these important posts, they must submit to a training that will fit them for work': *ibid.*, p. 122.

recognition as rebuilders of community lost. In the case of young men of Broad Church background, the urge to professionalise an existing informal role was slower to emerge. The role of parish clergyman was, after all, already available. Yet the combined effects of upbringing and schooling were, over time, equally powerful, as can be seen from the public career of Charles Bosanquet (1834–1905). The first salaried secretary of the COS was, on his own admission, induced to take his ‘first plunge’ into London community work by acting on the assumptions he had learned as the son of a north-country landowner: ‘I had for some time felt that I ought to have acquaintances amongst my poor neighbours as I always had in the country . . . [T]he want of neighbourly feeling is one of the great evils of large towns.’¹¹² The feeling had been further encouraged by a mid-century Oxford education and exposure, while training as a barrister at Lincoln’s Inn, to the Christian socialism of its chaplain, F. D. Maurice. Significantly, the first vehicle for the expression of Bosanquet’s cross-class acquaintance-making was Louisa Twining’s Workhouse Visiting Society which he joined shortly after its foundation in 1858. He then graduated in the mid-1860s to Tait’s London Diocesan Lay Helpers’ Association, a voluntary society explicitly designed to ‘balance’ female community-building efforts with male ones.¹¹³ Bosanquet was secretary of this association at the time of his appointment to the COS post.

Bosanquet’s fall-back to the family role of Northumberland squire in 1874 cut short any further development of his career in professionalised voluntarism but left the way open for further professionalisation under his ultimately more influential successor as COS secretary, Charles Stewart Loch (1849–1923). Loch, too, had been shaped in youth by exposure to a doctrine of privilege earned by strenuous leadership. More strongly than Bosanquet, he retained an evangelical sense of sin, and of the redemptive power of suffering, though his ‘church of charity’ was of course firmly in the Broad Church tradition of seeking to build community on the basis of non-sectarian social inclusiveness.

More single-mindedly than Bosanquet, however, Loch sought to reconcile the need for cross-class sympathy with the need for social intervention to be placed on a ‘scientific’ basis. This was partly the sign of ideas absorbed by a young man of a slightly later generation. Loch had been the pupil of the New Liberal T. H. Green at Oxford rather than the disciple of F. D. Maurice at Lincoln’s Inn. He was also prone to attacks of social Darwinist pessimism about the potential of philanthropic intervention to act as a subversion of the ‘natural laws’ of survival and adaptive mutation. In this he was moving with many of his educated contemporaries, though possibly more anxiously than most. To a

¹¹² C. P. B. Bosanquet, *London. Some Account of its Growth, Charitable Agencies and Wants* (1868), pp. 168, 151, cited in Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, p. 109.

¹¹³ Twining, *Recollections*, p. 156; *Church Progress: A Monthly Record of Home Mission Work*, June 1869, pp. 17–20.

degree this anxiety can be attributed to his own sense of career vulnerability (he was an asthmatic, of Scots-Indian family background, too sceptical of religious orthodoxy to contemplate a career as a clergyman).¹¹⁴ On the other hand, his precocious aptitude for policy formulation and administration – he was twenty-six when appointed to the COS – was very much a characteristic admired by Whig elites in a post-1867 public sphere of democratic decision-making tempered by professional advice and execution. In an age of differentiation of expertise, Loch came during the 1870s and early 80s to embody the science of poverty management. In this way he was eventually to point out the road to displacement from public life of the COS Broad-Church Whig aristocrats who had first championed the cause of disciplined personally delivered cross-class charity in the aftermath of 1867 and ‘democracy’ – though this was not clear to contemporaries until two and more decades later.¹¹⁵

As can be deduced, it was the hope of all the moral reform leaders identified so far to act as preservers of a stratified social order by demonstrating the willingness of the privileged to discharge their duty with competence and compassion. In this sense they can be labelled as ‘insiders’ hoping wherever feasible to depoliticise social relations. As must be evident from discussion in previous sections of this chapter, this label is one not easy to apply to the majority among mid-Victorian moral reform leaders. Indeed, the conservative cultural perception was that moral reform was a project devised by crazed irresponsibles – outsiders, chip on shoulder, with very limited experience of power or human nature. Among the activists they had in mind were a range of north-of-England Nonconformist radicals of whom the Sheffield businessman, H. J. Wilson, may stand as representative of many.

Wilson (1833–1914), as earlier noted, made his eventual national reputation in moral reform as organiser of the Northern Counties League for the Repeal of the CD Acts (1872), though it is revealing to find that his organising abilities had already been deployed during the 1860s on behalf of both the temperance movement and the Liberation Society. (He was eventually to become the president of the British Temperance League and treasurer of the Liberation Society.) Significantly, his revulsion for the idea of state-regulated prostitution had been aroused by exposure to foreign example – the experience of a trip on business

¹¹⁴ C. L. Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society 1869–1913* (1961), pp. 63–4; M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience. T. H. Green and his Age* (1964), pp. 129–35, 332–6. For a representative example of Loch’s social Darwinism, see *Diary of Charles Stewart Loch*, 1 July 1879, University of London, Dept of Palaeography, MS 801.

¹¹⁵ For examples of the continuing post-1867 hopes of Whig Broad Churchmen such as the Hon. and Revd W. H. Fremantle and Lord Lichfield, see Roberts, ‘Charity Disestablished?’, pp. 56–61. An alternative route, it should be noted, was followed by the Whig but idiosyncratic WVS and COS patron, William Cowper-Temple, first Lord Mount-Temple (1811–88), who will reappear as a born-again Evangelical in 1880s social purity campaigning.

to the Paris Exposition of 1867.¹¹⁶ Further radicalised by what he regarded as the betrayal of Nonconformity by the Forster Education Act of 1870, he played a key role in the following ‘Nonconformist revolt’ by his encouragement of the most prominent Liberal Nonconformist critic of the Act, Joseph Chamberlain, to stand as candidate for Sheffield at the 1874 general election. As a result, Chamberlain lost and the Tory-assisted Radical J. A. Roebuck topped the poll. This impeccable record of ‘faddism’, as it seemed to more cosmopolitan observers, released Wilson for even greater efforts on behalf of CD Acts repeal – though it is notable that even in this cause he gave periodic alarm to his otherwise close ally, Mrs Butler. (He proposed, in 1875, as a solution to the problem of the discriminatory regulation of women for engaging in prostitution the creation of a legal offence of ‘fornication’, applicable to male and female alike.¹¹⁷) It comes as no surprise to learn that, on his eventual election as MP for a mining constituency in 1885, he continued to perplex even provincial radical allies by his inability to decide whether state power was a resource to be used to implement an Old Testament vision of godly rule by the righteous or, instead, a continuing threat to the exercise of individual conscience.

Meanwhile, other Nonconformist leaders had been adjusting more flexibly to opportunity presented. Just as MacGregor and Peek stand as examples of Evangelical adaptability, so may similar figures be found among mid-Victorian Nonconformists. While leaders like Wilson continued to value their integrity as uncorrupted provincial outsiders, an increasing number of Nonconformists were using the opportunities presented by the restructuring of electoral politics to enter public life on a metropolitan and national stage. The label ‘Nonconformist conscience’, we find, first becomes appropriate to apply in the years around 1870 – the label marking a turning point in attitudes towards the state and its trustworthiness and duty towards vulnerable citizens.¹¹⁸

Two notable moral reform embodiments of the Nonconformist conscience were Benjamin Waugh (1839–1908), eventual anchor of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and Percy Bunting (1836–1911), foundation chairman of the National Vigilance Association. (A third, rather younger example, W. T. Stead, makes his appearance in chapter 6 following.) On the scale of provincial-occupational marginality it is Waugh, the son of a Yorkshire saddler, who outranks Bunting, the Manchester-born grandson of

¹¹⁶ See C. Binfield’s entry in J. Baylen and N. Gossman (eds.), *Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* (1988), iii.875.

¹¹⁷ James Stuart to H. J. Wilson, 11 Aug. 1875, Butler papers, The Women’s Library, London. See also the same to the same, 4 Sept. 1875, and the discussion in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 140–1.

¹¹⁸ D. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience. Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (1982), pp. 11–17. Cf. T. Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality. Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1999), pp. 171ff., 267–70; S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 123–4.

the early-nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodist Conference president, the Revd Jabez Bunting. On the scale of distrust of existing cultural hierarchies too the UKA branch secretary and Airedale College-trained Congregational minister Waugh outranks the Owens College, Manchester, then Cambridge and Lincoln's Inn-trained barrister-conveyancer Bunting. Yet both felt drawn into public life by routes that ultimately led to familiarity with, and broad acceptance of, metropolitan ways, and to state-assisted solutions to national moral evils.¹¹⁹

It was Waugh who made his mark on the metropolis first. Arriving (via Newbury) as the Independent minister to Maze Hill chapel, Greenwich, in 1866, he had impressed his congregation and enough of the local trade union network to ensure his return as member for Greenwich on the first London School Board in 1870. There he became an expert on 'neglected children', on whose behalf he campaigned for a national system of juvenile courts. His vision of non-sectarian community-shared projects of social reclamation soon impressed even his Established Church School Board opponents. (Among these was Francis Peek who, in 1873, subsidised the distribution of Waugh's book, *The Gaol Cradle, Who Rocks It?* to magistrates across England.¹²⁰) Like John MacGregor, another fellow board member, Waugh was also a skilful journalist and publicist, assisted by the fact that he 'looked and spoke and acted like a Hebrew prophet'. The message he preached, however, was sufficiently community-focused to protect him against ready identification with denominational politics. As the Broad Church Canon Farrar of Westminster revealingly confessed in 1884, after discovering Waugh was not the appropriate choice to deliver a sermon: 'Dear Sir, – I was under the impression that you were a member of the Anglican Church.'¹²¹ This was a firm foundation on which to build his second career as secretary and managing director of the NSPCC (1884–1905).

It was less easy for the Methodist Percy Bunting to throw off his hereditary identity as denominational lay leader, yet he too found the 1870s both a provocation and an invitation to enter public life. Already active as a promoter of denominational schools, he was probably prompted to take a part in the CD Acts repeal campaign by his sister, Sarah Maclardie Bunting (since 1870 the wife of leading campaign lawyer and feminist Professor Sheldon Amos). By 1875 the Buntings were Josephine Butler's valued allies in setting up the British, Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of Government Regulation of Prostitution. Within little more than a decade Bunting, in his role as foundation chairman of the National Vigilance Association (1886), was to

¹¹⁹ For Bunting, see *DNB*; for Waugh, see R. Waugh, *The Life of Benjamin Waugh* (1913), pp. 21–44.

¹²⁰ G. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England, 1870–1908* (Stanford CA, 1982), pp. 59–63; and see Waugh, *Life of B. Waugh*, pp. 63–4.

¹²¹ Waugh, *Life of B. Waugh*, p. 117. Cf. p. 135.

come to embody for Mrs Butler some of the more objectionable features of the Nonconformist conscience – in particular, its surprising new confidence in law enforcement as a means of bringing the righteous community into existence.¹²² But in the period of trial and adversity that had come between, recruits such as the Buntings were signs of a consolidated Nonconformist front for moral progress.

Beyond the conventional limits of the Nonconformist conscience, however, there lurked critics of the mid-Victorian moral order who defined nonconformity in ways that unsettled even Nonconformists. These radicals tended to be associated with an interlocking set of Unitarian families of often unchallengeable ‘insider’ occupational and cultural credentials, apart from the subversive fact that ‘they attended neither church nor chapel’.¹²³ This did not necessarily mean that they were unbelievers. It did, however, mean that they tended to envisage the divine as an evolving presence in human culture itself rather than as an immutable being revealed through Scripture and worshipped institutionally. It also meant that many of them rejected the doctrine of salvation through Christ’s atoning sacrifice for sin as a relic of a more primitive stage of human evolution. To Unitarians, therefore, the world was increasingly interpreted as a place of opportunity for moral self-refinement rather than of trial and justified suffering. Because of this, Unitarians were unusually open to projects of modernisation not merely of methods of exerting community discipline but of the moral values to be enforced.

At the centre of the Unitarian network of moral reform activists stood the ‘Muswell Hill brigade’ – so named because its members met regularly on Sunday evenings at the London suburban home of the wealthy radical solicitor, W. H. Ashurst. In the mid-Victorian decades its best-known member in political life was James Stansfeld, by then husband of Ashurst’s daughter, Caroline.¹²⁴ Its best-known member in voluntary associational life, however, was Ashurst’s one-time articulated clerk, William Shaen (1821–87). It will be recalled that Shaen and Stansfeld were first sighted as radical young supporters of the Associate Institute during the mid-1840s. Shaen then rather fades from view while building his law career but emerges, as we have seen, during the 1860s to become a pillar of support to the women’s education movement, the CD Acts repeal movement, the Vigilance Association and the Social Purity Alliance. Within these movements Shaen’s contribution was acknowledged by contemporaries to be pivotal more

¹²² *Personal Rights Journal*, no. 86 (Jan. 1889), pp. 3–4. For the recruitment of the Buntings to the CD Acts repeal cause, see *The New Abolitionists. A Narrative of a Year’s Work* (1876), pp. 168–72.

¹²³ Malleon, *Autobiographical Notes and Letters*, p. 97.

¹²⁴ For a general appraisal of the circle, see K. Gleadle, ‘“Our Several Spheres”: Middle-Class Women and the Feminisms of Early Victorian Radical Politics’, in K. Gleadle and S. Richardson (eds.), *Women in British Politics 1760–1860. The Power of the Petticoat* (2000), ch. 7.

on the basis of his abilities as a lawyer, organiser and conciliator of the morally inflamed than on the basis of his ability to articulate in public a distinctive moral vision.¹²⁵ Yet he certainly had such a vision. It was a vision blending the Unitarian belief in human beings' capacity for self-realisation with a romantic conviction of the warping effects on character of repressive, culturally outdated institutions. The task of the moral reformer, therefore, was to assist society's victims to become free moral agents. As early as 1846 he had claimed to 'see much more hope from the thoughtful struggles of the low than from all the benevolence of the high'.¹²⁶ This was in his early Chartist days. Later causes taken up on behalf of the oppressed and victimised were perhaps more paternalistic by some definitions. (Shaen's early romantic characterisation of 'Women [as] ever the regenerators of society, without them men would become either clods or devils' certainly intensified his veneration for them as home-makers and shapers of infant character.¹²⁷) Nonetheless, the goal remained equality in citizenship, and if that required (as Shaen believed it did) men to resocialise themselves to a woman-defined standard of sexual restraint, then that was a step towards the moral improvement of the whole society as long as it was brought about by culturally assisted self-discipline.

In this way, not without tension, Unitarians were able to expand the scope of moral reform without fatally fracturing its 'cultural pedigree'. A more dramatic illustration of this process may be found in the career of a fellow Unitarian and even more heterodox radical, Frances Power Cobbe. The dramatic impact is generated in part by the contrast between Cobbe's 'reactionary' cultural origins and her ultimate public reputation. Cobbe (1822–1904), the daughter of a Protestant Anglo-Irish landowner, remained loyal throughout her life to the ideal of a hierarchical social order and, indeed, to the Conservative side in politics. In addition, she had developed by the 1870s, in response to the perceived heartlessness of male medical science, a distaste for the pursuit of progress through professional knowledge verging on the aristocratic. This cluster of cultural attitudes was, in many respects, in tension with the middle-class, radical liberal, professional ethos of the Muswell Hill brigade. And yet she

¹²⁵ The most comprehensive brief account of Shaen's life and activities is Eugene Rasor's entry in *Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, iii.450–4. On Shaen's business and negotiating skills see Octavia Hill's testimony in C. Edmund Maurice (ed.), *The Life of Octavia Hill as Told in her Letters* (1913), p. 298; also Josephine Butler's letter of condolence on his death (M. J. Shaen, *William Shaen. A Brief Sketch* (1912), p. 34) which makes special mention of his 'calm judgment, and his gentle and conciliatory manners'.

¹²⁶ William Shaen to his sister, 5 March 1846, Symington Collection (WYL218) Box 19, West Yorks Archive Service, Leeds. The letter continues: 'The fearful inequalities of society are not misfortunes to be pitied and alleviated but injustices to be proclaimed and destroyed.' For the variant theological strands in nineteenth-century Unitarianism, including the 1830+ embrace of German romanticism, see R. Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England 1760–1860* (1998), pp. 99–112.

¹²⁷ Shaen to his sister, 10 Oct. 1848, Symington Collection.

was recognised by them, for the most part, as an ally – a moral reformer with a vision of cultural transformation compatible with their own.¹²⁸ The key lay in her articulation of that vision through Unitarian theology. An early rebel against patriarchal evangelical orthodoxy, she made her first public declaration of intellectual independence in a theological exposition on the instinctive, universal and gradually self-improving nature of human moral beliefs, published in 1855.

Pure Morals rest not on any traditional dogma, not on history, on philology, on criticism, but on those intuitions . . . which thine own soul finds in its depths . . . Pure Morals offer no panacea . . . They teach that the passions, which are the machinery of our moral life, are not to be miraculously annihilated, but by slow and unwearied endeavour to be brought into obedience to the Holy Will . . . As ages of millenniums roll away, we see a double progress working . . . a progress of each race and of each individual. Slowly and securely, though with many an apparent retrogression, does each world-family become better, wiser, nobler, happier. Slowly and securely, though with many a grievous backsliding, each living soul grows up to Virtue.¹²⁹

Liberated by her father's death in 1857 to a life no longer centred on her own family, Cobbe strove first to apply her prescription for 'obedience to the Holy Will' to work with delinquent girls under Mary Carpenter's direction at Bristol but, frustrated by Carpenter's 'stoicism', thereafter moved to London and a career in journalism. It was as a result of her reputation as a journalist that she was co-opted to the circles of London radical middle-class Unitarian progressivism, among them the circles of the emergent 1860s women's movement. It was not until the 1870s (as noted in the previous section of this chapter) that she committed herself to the central preoccupation of the rest of her life – the anti-vivisection movement. Her relations with her co-workers in all these causes remained volatile. A self-proclaimed non-denominational 'theist' to the end, she disconcerted both evangelicals and many middle-class secular professionals. The temptation was, and remains, to typecast her as a romantic reactionary – and yet her mutant vision of a public world morally refined by a post-Christian commitment to the abolition of cruelty in all its variant forms undoubtedly extended the range of moral sensitivities of her contemporaries and intellectual peers. On balance, we are driven to conclude, she sought a world culturally transformed rather than restored.

With our attempt to compare and contrast the cultural visions of both the privilege-vindicators and the privilege-challengers of mid-Victorian moral

¹²⁸ Direct contact began in the later 1850s as a result of shared, though typically disputatious, interest in Italian political unification: Cobbe, *Life*, ii.5. For a helpful evaluation of the influence of Cobbe's social origins on her later attitudes (including evaluation of the reliability of Cobbe's self-presentation in her autobiography), see B. Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 110–15, 126–7, 141–6.

¹²⁹ Frances Power Cobbe, *Essay on the Theory of Intuitive Morals* (1855), quoted in *Life*, i.132–4.

reformism now complete, one final enigma remains: how to label the motives and thought-patterns of the moral reform leader widely acknowledged by her contemporaries as the most magnetic of all. Josephine Butler (1828–1906), whether worshipped or deplored, remained the articulator of a moral vision that staked its persuasive power precisely on its gallantry in confronting entrenched interest, heedless of rank or professional status. ‘I have no interest in the operation of the [CD] Acts . . . but I will tell you what you wish to know as to my view on the principle of the Acts’, as she summed up her position in evidence to the royal commissioners of 1871.¹³⁰

In contrast to Cobbe, therefore, the initial impression of Josephine Butler is that of challenger of privilege. An Evangelical Churchwoman herself, she married a Broad Church clergyman and found her closest repeal allies among Nonconformists such as H. J. Wilson. The daughter of a Whig landowner father, she transformed his fervour to end slavery into an archetype of the moral reform mission of liberation from oppression to self-management. In her campaigns against the CD Acts she made deliberate and notable attempts to enlist the support of the new class of voters – urban working-class males – and indeed was invited in 1873 to address the new ‘parliament of the working man’, the Trades Union Congress. Recurrently throughout the 1870s (and 1880s) she was to use the language of class warfare – at least so far as that was cast in the form of a struggle between ‘aristocratic privilege’ and ‘the people’.

Yet her motives for engagement were more complex than a list of her public associates quite makes clear.¹³¹ As the reassembly of the mosaic of her (often undated) archive now reveals, it was a family-nurtured sense of Evangelical duty that shaped her earliest thoughts of public moral obligation.¹³² This sense of duty was first translated into sustained action after the loss of her young daughter, killed in a fall from a stair landing before her parents’ helpless gaze, in 1864. In the hope of gaining a renewed sense of God’s purpose she then began a period of work to alleviate the suffering of ‘fellow sinners’ in the Liverpool workhouse. Thereafter, for a time, a workhouse-reinforced realisation of the precarious position of women in a ‘masculinised’ Victorian workforce drew Butler back towards a more Whig-conditioned role as advocate of justice for the oppressed.¹³³ But, late in 1869, following the passing of the CD Act of that year, the Evangelical sense of mission returned to take the upper hand:

¹³⁰ *PP* 1871 (c. 408), xix. Q 12863, quoted in Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 394.

¹³¹ Among the many general biographical assessments of Josephine Butler I have found the following most helpful: Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, ch. 5; J. Uglow, ‘Josephine Butler: From Sympathy to Theory’, in D. Spender (ed.), *Feminist Theorists* (1983), pp. 146–64.

¹³² H. Mathers, ‘The Evangelical Spirituality of a Victorian Feminist: Josephine Butler, 1828–1906’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52 (2001), pp. 282–312, esp. pp. 288–302.

¹³³ Josephine Butler, ‘Introduction’, in *Woman’s Work and Woman’s Culture* (1869), esp. pp. xv–xvi, xlii.

Oh Christ, if Thy spirit fainted in that hour, how can mine sustain it? Nothing so wears me out, body and soul, as anger, fruitless anger; and this thing fills me with such an anger, and even hatred, that I fear to face it. The thought of this atrocity kills charity and hinders my prayers. But there is surely a way of being angry without sin . . . This is perhaps after all the very work, the very mission, I longed for years ago, and saw coming afar off, like a bright star. But seen near, as it approaches, it is so dreadful, so difficult, so disgusting, that I tremble to look at it; and it is hard to see and know whether or not God is indeed calling me concerning it.¹³⁴

The leadership invitation extended shortly afterwards by the newly founded Ladies' National Association helped (in combination with her husband's concurrence in her identification of her mission) to resolve this uncertainty. The reasons for which it might continue to be justified, however, remained fluid in Butler's mind. Part of it always remained an evangelical mission to combat state-endorsed 'wickedness'. Part of it (and the more so in retrospect) became a Whig commitment to defend the civil liberties of the politically unrepresented against the monopoly power of insensitive and over-confident public authorities. And, because those authorities were exclusively male, part of it became a feminist protest against the exclusion of women from public administration and decision-making.

All these justifications were relevant to the finding and mobilisation of an alliance of supporters to the cause of CD Acts repeal and it is a simple enough insight to suggest that Butler's frequent rebalancing of her arguments was a tactical move designed to ensure that the appropriate mixture was delivered to the appropriate audience at the appropriate moment. Yet tactics alone provide insufficient explanation for Butler's protean moral vision. Equally persuasive is the likelihood that she felt deeply committed both to the evangelical struggle against sin and to the Whig principle of checks and balances in the exercise of public authority; both to the belief in women as home-based embodiments of moral sensitivity and to the need for women protectors of moral virtue to gain a secure public status; both to the belief that the English home was the cradle of moral virtue not to be subverted by the espionage of state agents and to the belief that the state might need at least to empower citizens to act against hidden sin. For the time being she was not called on to reconcile these potentially irreconcilable stances. What hints she let drop that she *was* preparing to face these future dilemmas suggest more concern to preserve an imperfect but bearable existing moral order than a progressivist hope for a moral order transformed.¹³⁵ In the course of the 1880s, as we shall see in chapter 6, she was

¹³⁴ Reflection recorded 'Sept 1869', and quoted in Butler, *An Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 68. See also commentary in Mathers, 'Evangelical Spirituality of a Victorian Feminist', pp. 286–8.

¹³⁵ *The Choice between Personal Freedom and State Protection: Addresses delivered by the Hon. Auberon Herbert and Mrs Butler at the Annual Meeting of the Vigilance Association, 1880* (1880), pp. 17–19.

to be forced to declare her priorities more distinctly. This task was to test her diplomatic skills beyond their limit.

Dilemmas of self-help: individualism and the ties of community

As the tensions in Josephine Butler's thought reveal, moral reform in the mid-Victorian decades faced yet again its recurring dilemma – a dilemma of matching ends with means. On the one hand, moral reform, for the majority of its mid-Victorian supporters, implied a commitment to the creation of a society of self-managing adult individuals. Given that 'political economy, evangelical theology, and strict utilitarianism [alike] allowed little scope for social arrangements that were not reducible to the functions and free choices of rational individuals', this was to be expected.¹³⁶ On the other hand, the business of moral reform lay not merely with preaching the adult ideal but with devising effective strategies for achieving and preserving it. How to train the young to independent adulthood (whatever that might mean)? How to assist them to retain that status once attained? How to decide when the cultural odds against preservation of independence of character proved so great that moral transgression became an indication of victimhood? And how might the damage be repaired?

As in previous generations, some strategies for dealing with these issues were thought to require the authority of the state, and the spectacular political campaigns of the temperance and CD Acts repeal movements will form the final section of discussion here. Yet mid-Victorian moral reform is as notable for its community-building projects as for its crusades, and it is to strategies for the proclaimed re-establishment of social intimacy – the strengthening of character by personal contact – that we need first to turn.

It will be recalled that the technique of reclaiming sinners through a process of sympathetic 'tendering' was one earlier practised by Elizabeth Fry. Other techniques of exerting 'domestic' rather than coercive influence over groups identified as morally vulnerable had been developed in the 1820s and 30s by religion-linked district visiting associations and city missions. With the reform of state institutions in the direction of impersonal disciplinary regimes, and the increasing respect paid to political economy as a guide to 'true charity', however, moral reform by exertion of 'domestic influence' had tended to lose identity as a distinct project.

From mid-century forward, this changed. It changed for a variety of reasons, not least (as noted on p. 204 above) as the result of experience of living with the medium-term outcomes of institutional reform. But it changed most notably because of the mid-century re-emergence of women into public policy debate. It was in 1869 that Josephine Butler made probably the most uncompromising

¹³⁶ J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit. Britain 1870–1914* (Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 223.

justification of this return. Starting from the premise, established as unchallengeable by the preceding generation, 'that Home is the nursery of all virtue, the fountain-head of all true affection', she went on to deduce not only a duty to 'giv[e] forth of the influences of homes, as reservoirs of blessing for the common good' but also an opportunity to discipline 'selfishness in the enjoyment of the family circle'. To this end she recommended (and indeed practised) the experimental introduction of a stranger 'homeless and solitary and sinful' to middle- and upper-class homes.¹³⁷

This stern test of biblical virtue was a challenge only rarely taken up, but the duty to attempt 'a great enlargement of hearts' by repersonalising cross-class social relationships was, from the mid-1850s onwards, an argument with wide resonance in moral reform circles. From a culturally conservative point of view it reaffirmed the propriety of woman's mission to other women and to the vulnerable. As the earl of Shaftesbury put it in 1859, '[M]en may discover principles . . . but the instant the work becomes minute, individual, and personal, the instant that it leaves the open field and touches the home; the instant it requires tact, sentiment, and delicacy; from that instant it passes into the hands of woman.'¹³⁸ From the point of view of ratepayers and employers it revalidated the standing of outside visitors as monitors of the public interest in regimes of workhouse and prison management. And, from the point of view of liberal progressives with Social Science Association enthusiasms, it opened vistas of professionalisation of social management for purposes otherwise difficult to promote without attracting charges of female sentimentality.¹³⁹

While it is true that not all institutional doors swung open in welcome to the gospel of the communion of labour – prisons, most notably, did not – it was certainly the case that the rediscovery of techniques of influence based on social intimacy gave women participants in public policy debate a status in dealing with male administrative elites which they had previously struggled to achieve.¹⁴⁰ While in some quarters a residual suspicion remained of women charity workers as impulsive enthusiasts, blind to wider issues of principle, this was no longer an argument for the obstruction of their efforts. Rather, it became an argument for 'balancing' women's activities by the encouragement of increased male commitment, and for professionalising the activities of both. The result was a major extension of confidence among volunteers in the value of schemes of intervention to rescue groups identified to be at moral risk.

This work had begun, as we have seen (p. 205), as a system of moral support for workhouse girls sent into service – girls seen by critics of workhouse training

¹³⁷ Butler, 'Introduction', in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, pp. xxv, xxviii, xl.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, p. 128.

¹³⁹ Cobbe, *Life*, i.330; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 125–37.

¹⁴⁰ Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 171–2; A. Summers, *Female Lives, Moral States. Women, Religion and Public Life in Britain 1800–1930* (Newbury, 2000), pp. 16, 23, 47–8.

practices not merely as incompetently trained servants but as potential victims of sexual exploitation and recruits to prostitution.¹⁴¹ Thereafter, methods of rescue based on the provision of various forms of ‘home influence’ spread to workhouse children; then, by the early 1870s, to city ‘waifs and strays’.¹⁴² Public officials with long memories of the parish apprenticeship and boarding-out schemes of a previous age reacted from time to time with hostility and predictions of scandal, but were persuaded by degrees to give way to the new approach.¹⁴³

By the 1870s, in fact, so strong was the belief in the socialising effect of ‘home influence’ that calls began to be made for the state to define minimum standards of family performance of its moralising task, and to authorise intervention if those standards were not met.¹⁴⁴ This line of policy development was less easy for moral reform advocates to reconcile with existing conventions of adult moral responsibility and many took care to distance themselves from what they could predict would draw criticism: ‘It is most important on all grounds to avoid severing or weakening . . . the ties of family, even where, owing to the character of the parents, it might be thought that the Children would be benefited by removal from their control.’¹⁴⁵ Yet, despite such hesitations, some volunteers persisted in attempts to retrieve neglected or abused children ‘literally “lost” to their own mothers’ within dissolute working-class families.¹⁴⁶ As the chapter following will reveal, this work was eventually to lead to controversial demands for state authorisation. For the moment it remained an issue ‘unripe’ for resolution, as Mr Gladstone might have expressed it.

On the wider front of ‘cross-class sympathy’, however, the push to extend home influence continued – indeed, became more systematic and widespread in operation during the 1870s. As noted when discussing the emergence of ‘disciplinary liberalism’ (pp. 207ff.), volunteer response to the coming of democracy was heavily tinged with the belief that more effort needed to be directed to the formation of working-class ‘character’. The most ambitious volunteer blueprint for securing this was that of the COS and it was in practice one of the first policy decisions of the COS council that ‘the systematic visitation of the poor at

¹⁴¹ Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, ii.512–13. For the 1874–5 foundation of the two principal voluntary organisations associated with maternal oversight of working-class girls entering the workforce, see *Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants. Report No. 8* (1883), pp. 5–7; B. Harrison, ‘For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls’ Friendly Society 1874–1920’, *Past and Present*, no. 61 (1973), pp. 108–11.

¹⁴² Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, pp. 516–33; Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, pp. 134–42; G. Wagner, *Barnardo* (1979), ch. 5.

¹⁴³ Pinchbeck and Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, pp. 523–4, 530.

¹⁴⁴ Behlmer, *Friends of the Family*, ch. 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Boarding Out Pauper Children. A Reprint of the Memorial of Ladies* (3rd edn, [1871]), p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ See, e.g., [Jane] Ellice Hopkins, *Ladies Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls* (1878), pp. 3–4, 11, 14–18.

their own homes' was 'indispensable' to 'an effective system of charity'.¹⁴⁷ By 'effective' the COS council meant a variety of qualities. Effectiveness meant, first, the abolition of 'charity by proxy' and the remoralisation of cross-class transfers by means of 'sympathy, friendship, intercourse' in addition to, or in place of, material assistance. This in turn required givers to take a continuing interest in the circumstances of individuals needing relief in order to decide what relief was most appropriate as well as to monitor its effect to the point at which the assisted individual was restored to self-reliance. And, given that self-reliance was now openly identified as a status as much household-defined as labour-market-defined, effective charity also required knowledge of family culture:

Depend upon it, if we thought of the poor primarily as husbands, wives, sons, and daughters, members of households, as we are ourselves, instead of contemplating them as a different class, we should recognise better how . . . home duty was our best preparation for work among them.¹⁴⁸

In practice, as we know, the COS attempt to domesticate charitable relationships between classes proved more difficult to implement than had been hoped. The overriding problem was one of establishing the initial trust on which friendly cross-class advice might build. The COS policy of investigation before relief, when supervised competently, certainly overcame the problem of indiscriminate charity associated with denominational and private giving. At the same time it created a large proportion of applicants for assistance who, 'after full investigation and visiting', felt 'made fools of' because 'nothing was to be done for them' beyond a casebook entry.¹⁴⁹ The COS faced particular embarrassment when its 'family responsibility' approach appeared to penalise dependants (children especially) who were to be denied support on the ground that 'relief which made the parents improvident would not be, in the long run, beneficial to the child'.¹⁵⁰

Given the dilemmas faced by family-focused caseworkers it was all too easy for defenders of 'traditional' charitable practices to condemn COS claims of friendly domestic concern as insincere or even sinister spy strategies – designed at least in part to divert resources into the pockets of office-bound administrators. The effect on the society's work by the end of its first decade was schizophrenic. On the one hand, COS supporters were regularly acknowledging by ritual admission that COS work was widely unpopular for much the same reasons as charity co-ordination attempts had been since the 1820s. (Lord Shaftesbury, speaking at the 1876 annual meeting, confessed to receiving 'a great number of letters of

¹⁴⁷ H. Bosanquet, *Social Work in London 1869–1912* (1914; reprinted Brighton, 1973), p. 54.

¹⁴⁸ Octavia Hill, *District Visiting* (1877), quoted in Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁹ Bosanquet, *Social Work*, p. 42, and see Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, pp. 54–7.

¹⁵⁰ *CO Reporter*, 11 July 1877, quoted in Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, p. 54.

abuse for being so very wicked as to have anything to do with this Society'.¹⁵¹) On the other hand, the society's policy leaders – Octavia Hill and C. S. Loch in particular – clung the more tenaciously to the vision of a perfected COS as an agency of moral regeneration – an agency acting, not merely through the labour market (as the Mendicity Society, for example, had done), but through working-class family life.¹⁵²

Of course, as COS leaders also realised, the COS vision relied for effective implementation not only on the persistence of its volunteer agents but also on a declared specialisation of role – a role shared with the state. In the case of the COS that meant reliance on poor law authorities to enforce a standard sufficient to deter able-bodied evaders of the citizen duty to be self-supporting. Only if this could be guaranteed would the volunteer task of carefully targeted assistance to the involuntarily (but not chronically) incapacitated become manageable.

The COS was not alone in this dependence on co-operation with public authorities, though it was the most articulate in spelling out in explicit treaty form its expectation of co-ordinated action. Given the general openness among administrative and political elites towards schemes of 'disciplinary liberalism' during the 1860s and 70s, the task of establishing a mutually accepted relationship with state authority was a task faced by a wide range of volunteer campaigners of this generation. For some, the increased investment now made by the state in the policing of public behaviour gave the opportunity to shift patrolling and prosecuting expenses to the public purse.¹⁵³ For others, it began to hint at possible openings towards further professionalisation of support roles in the rehabilitation of the morally damaged. (The role of the probation officer is traceable to the informal agreement reached in 1879 between London magistrates and the Church of England Temperance Society to release cautioned offenders into the supervision of society missionaries.¹⁵⁴)

For yet others, however, the professionally assisted extension of state powers provoked outrage and, in some cases, outright confrontation with police and public authorities.¹⁵⁵ So distressed indeed were the more politically pessimistic of CD Acts repealers that there developed during the course of the 1870s a significant backlash, not just against the Acts, but against centralised, professionalised systems of policing as a whole. The backlash was most vehement among women repealers, with Josephine Butler arguing through a series of publications that constitutional liberties were essentially 'personal liberties'

¹⁵¹ Bosanquet, *Social Work*, pp. 63, 124, and see generally pp. 121–7.

¹⁵² Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, pp. 25–37, 51.

¹⁵³ Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 111, 131, though cf. Wigley, *Victorian Sunday*, pp. 124–5, for the effective collapse of attempts to enforce Sunday observance by prosecution in the early 1870s. For national statistics of police growth, see Gattrell, 'Decline of Theft and Violence', pp. 275–6.

¹⁵⁴ Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, p. 306. ¹⁵⁵ Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 171–4.

that ought, for the good of the whole society, to remain beyond the power of parliament to curtail. Among male critics of the supervisory state old libertarian-Nonconformist suspicions of arbitrary and unaccountable authority were starting to transmute into anti-socialist critiques of excessive social regulation not entirely congruent with the feminist vision of 'natural law'.¹⁵⁶ In combination, however, both contributed to a partial revival of enthusiasm for citizen self-reliance in matters of law enforcement – a revival which via the 1880s social purity movement was to help renew for a time a tradition of volunteer action which seemed otherwise to have outlived its purpose.

Whichever side of the state powers debate they supported, of course, moral reform leaders were either implicitly or explicitly acknowledging the changing expectations being placed on 'government' in an age of electoral reform. Indeed, from the point of view of the potentially outnumbered – and even more so from the point of view of the voteless – the fall-back strategy arguing for 'constitutional' limits to law-makers' powers is to be interpreted as an open sign of alarm about the likely pace and direction of policies designed to meet those expectations. Yet it must be stressed that it was not only opponents of state action who faced the challenge of making themselves heard in the reshaped political arena. Even those confident enough to demand moral improvement by law-making found themselves in need of new strategies of political action to gain attention.

Why was this? As in the years after the electoral reforms of 1832, so in the years after 1867 it took time to adjust. Up to that point the techniques developed by antislavery and Corn Law repeal campaigners had served the purpose of a new generation remarkably well. Both the UKA and the CD Acts repealers, for example, were formidable gatherers of petition signatures. Their efforts to canvass voters, and to create blocs of pledged electors for which rival candidates were expected to bid, were often successful enough to make credible their claims to represent significant blocs of voter opinion (and, it was hinted, of potential future voter opinion as well).

Between 1868 and 1872, however, the structure of national politics began to shift. A first challenge to campaigners was the raised threshold of effort needed merely to register an issue as politically significant. (The period 1868–72 recorded an 'all-time record' of petitions presented to the House of Commons. The annual average signature rate of 3,125,350 was more than twice the average for 1863–7.) This was surmountable: the highly organised UKA contributed 1,388,075 signatures to the 1872 total, the highly motivated LNA petitioners for CD Acts repeal 250,000 in 1871.¹⁵⁷ There were, however, other challenges, also

¹⁵⁶ See esp. J. Butler, *Government by Police* (2nd edn, 1880), pp. 7, 41–3, 57–65; Petrow, *Policing Morals*, ch. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Parry, *Rise and Fall*, p. 223; Harrison, *Drink*, p. 253; McHugh, *Prostitution*, p. 80.

new. For those hopeful of exerting direct influence on executive government, the links now maturing between Liberal politicians and the policy ‘experts’ of the Social Science Association posed a recurrent setback as ‘hard’ professionals and ‘sentimental’ moral reformers clashed in attempts to commandeer that recognised platform for the creation of informed public opinion. The simultaneous launch (in the years following the repeal of stamp and paper duties, 1855–61) of a range of influential metropolitan ‘periodicals of general culture’ also tended to provoke ‘unsentimental’ evaluation of moral reform goals. Though their impact could be neutralised to some degree by the spread of an (often sympathetic) provincial newspaper press, the attacks of a new generation of highly literate metropolitan intellectuals (the *Saturday Review* to the fore) were often damaging.¹⁵⁸ By contrast, those who hoped to win through by pressure on political candidates during elections faced the problem from 1872 onwards of remaining a credible force in an era of secret ballot, as well as of competing for the attention of a candidate often besieged by single-interest pressure groups.

Broadly speaking, electorally focused moral reform campaigners rose to these challenges, but not without setback and not without hesitation. The UKA, for example, while welcoming parliamentary reform in 1867, was left breathless by the technique used by Gladstone to mobilise national support across the new electorate in his Irish Church disestablishment campaign of 1868: ‘Never probably during the last fifty years has an election taken place in which parties ranged themselves so decisively upon a single issue as in the last . . . [I]n an election so warm, involving interests so large and questions so exciting, the full strength of the Alliance could not be put forth.’¹⁵⁹ Once the Gladstone government had been swept to power UKA leaders were still not certain how to use their influence to best effect. The major miscalculation of strength which they made in rejecting the government-sponsored licensing bill of 1871 has already been noticed (p. 213). This not only soured relations with government; it also helped to provoke a more nationally organised opposition to their activity among publicans. The immediate policy reaction of the UKA was to present itself as the new Anti-Corn Law League – an organisation prepared, if dissatisfied with the choices available, to sponsor its own candidates in parliamentary elections. It also moved to extend yet further its system of regional electoral committees charged with the task of registering temperance electors on a continuing basis. It was not the only disgruntled Nonconformist-leaning pressure group to do this and, partly as a consequence, in the 1874 general election the Liberal government was defeated. Gladstone famously declared that he had

¹⁵⁸ Collini, *Public Moralists*, pp. 53–5; Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 216–17. For relations of specific campaigners with the press, see McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 135–8, 165; Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition*, pp. 210–13; French, *Antivivisection*, pp. 266–70.

¹⁵⁹ UKA Annual Report 1869, quoted in Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, p. 179.

been ‘borne down in a torrent of gin and beer’, but it is now agreed that it was the inactivity of otherwise Liberal-leaning local electoral associations (temperance included) rather than the abnormal activity of their opponents that did more damage. Symbolically, too, it was a blow. To see the Liberal vote split by radical independents and the seat delivered to a Conservative (as happened when the irrepressible F. R. Lees stood at Leeds in 1874) was to learn a lesson. The lesson appeared to some to be that the age of the politically non-aligned pressure group was now over. Given the increasingly national and issue-focused character of election campaigns, the way forward might well require morally committed voters not to segregate themselves and risk exposing the limits of their electoral support base but, instead, to take up membership of the networks of Nonconformist-dominated Liberal Party electoral associations that were now starting to spread across urban provincial England. (The National Liberal Federation was formally launched in 1877.) This strategy of party ‘permeation’ had in fact first been canvassed among UKA leaders in 1873. It was, however, the shock of 1874 that helped to persuade leaders to give it serious support – so much so that, by 1876, the venerable spokesman for the UKA’s founder generation, Samuel Pope, was moved to announce ‘He would not object to seeing the temperance question made a party question if they liked’.¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile, by a parallel process of experience, CD Acts repealers were coming to similar conclusions. Repealers, it will be recalled, had, like the UKA, become disillusioned with the Gladstone government after refusing to accept legislative compromise in 1872 (see p. 216). They had, in revenge, turned their efforts to the electoral humiliation of a Liberal minister seeking re-election at Pontefract in August of that year. The move towards the formation of electoral leagues followed, with the hope that ‘at the next General Election, questions alike of party or place will be held subservient to the one great question of National Morality and National Justice’.¹⁶¹ Instead, the rancour and sectionalism of the Liberal support base helped to bring about electoral defeat. In the case of the CD Act repealers, the lesson of 1874 was then publicly underlined by the movement’s new parliamentary leader, the ex-Liberal minister, James Stansfeld: it was futile ‘to split up parties into small sections by undue pressure on candidates’.¹⁶² Because of the fact that an abnormally high proportion of its active workers were women, and therefore voteless, the repeal movement was not as well placed as the UKA to adopt a direct policy of permeation, but the pioneer efforts of the LNA to secure a public-speaking role for women repealers, in addition to the more traditional canvassing role, gave leverage of a sort. By the end of the 1870s the formerly rebellious LNA was indeed a loyal client of the Liberal Party.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, chs. ix–x. For Pope quotation see p. 207.

¹⁶¹ McHugh, *Prostitution*, p. 99. ¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 103. ¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 164–5, 182–3, 207.

In hindsight this 1870s shift towards recognition of one side in national politics as the party of moral reform carried two risks. The first was the risk of giving immediate and certain support in return for uncertain future reward. This was a risk that increased the longer the single-interest pressure group remained in active co-operation with a constituency party organisation. At some point permeation might lead to capture, not of party by pressure group but of pressure group by party, especially among radical Nonconformist activists. ‘Although he was a temperance man’, declared a Lancashire Baptist minister in 1878, ‘he was a citizen first, and he should not sacrifice twenty principles to secure one.’¹⁶⁴

The second risk was that, by entering into alliance with similarly enthusiastic single-issue pressure groups to use one party as a vehicle for the achievement of their goals, moral reform leaders ran the risk of creating an opportunity for their opponents to brand them as ‘faddists’ – a coalition of minorities trying to coerce a public opinion they had failed to persuade on the merits of their individual cases. The UKA, argued the political economist Stanley Jevons in 1876, acted as ‘the worst existing obstacle to temperance reform in the kingdom’ because it aimed to coerce rather than persuade public opinion. The accusation of faddism was, of course, a gift to the vested interests moral reformers wished to defeat, as parodists were all too ready to point out: ‘I am a member of the National Liberal Club, a teetotaler and a passive resister. I have recently married my deceased wife’s sister, and none of my children have been vaccinated.’¹⁶⁵ In short, the inconsistency, impracticality and unpopularity of certain moral reform causes, when aggregated, made ‘moral reform’ a more visible target for attack.

Yet, in the context of political life by the later 1870s, such considerations had limited influence on the calculations of UKA and repeal strategists. From their point of view, a rational adjustment was being made to overcome the tactical disaster of 1874. The rising influence of provincial Nonconformity in constituency politics was bound to pay a parliamentary dividend once the organisation of the new electorate had been completed. And, in the meantime, the constant work of mobilising electoral opinion trained parliamentary elites to be less grudging in their recognition of the role played by active citizens in national public debate.

As can now be seen, the conditions of mid-Victorian public life gave renewed and continuing incentive to groups seeking recognition as active citizens, moral reform voluntarists prominent among them. The most assertive campaigners under the banner of moral reform were undoubtedly those led by increasingly

¹⁶⁴ Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, p. 204; see also pp. 205–22.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in McHugh, *Prostitution*, p. 253. For Jevons see p. 251, and for John Bright to similar effect in 1874, see Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition*, p. 64.

self-confident provincial Nonconformists. In associations such as the UKA they set out to perfect new methods of electoral organisation in order to bend the coming of democracy to their own purposes. In parallel, and sometimes partly in reaction, defenders of hierarchy and of the duties of privilege also found motives for expanded action – as volunteer efforts both to ‘build community’ and to educate vulnerable new citizens to a stable standard of moral self-reliance made clear. Finally, and more unexpectedly, the coming of urban male democracy provoked the part-defensive, part-visionary intervention of those deliberately excluded from formal political citizenship – most notably the middle-class evangelical women of the CD Acts repeal campaign. In this way moral reform acted once again as a mechanism by which otherwise marginalised viewpoints might be expressed in public policy debate. And, while the era saw no symbolic triumphs to match the abolition of slavery in 1833, activists in a variety of movements continued to draw comfort from the belief that their causes were part of a still-unfolding tradition of liberation of individuals and communities into moral self-reliance.

The recurrent question, however, which appeal to tradition could not resolve, was the question of means. By what *methods* might individuals be liberated from ignorance, oppression or weakness of will into moral self-reliance? As the record of experiment has revealed, the creation of the morally autonomous individual in market-organised society was now widely accepted to be a more complicated process than had once been hoped. The self-help approach of temperance moral suasionists had been challenged by a variety of schemes for the creation of environments purged of market temptation. The labour discipline focus of earlier charity organisers had been supplemented by an interest in family culture. Sin-reproving attempts to reclaim prostitutes had been recast as attempts to reprove (and possibly criminalise) their customers.

All of these reappraisals were helping to reshape the moral reform perception of the reasonable limits of individual responsibility. At the same time they were helping to reshape attitudes to the use of state authority, and of professional expertise, in the regulation of citizen behaviour. By the end of the 1870s no clear consensus had emerged on the extent to which adjustment was to be accepted. Those hopeful of controlling the process welcomed it. Those fearful of losing control over it – and those concerned by the possible marginalisation of moral reform discourse in public debate – did not. How each group adapted to the increased level of opportunity and risk offered by the watershed decade of the 1880s forms the subject of chapter 6 following.

6 The late Victorian crisis of moral reform: the 1880s and after

On 4 July 1887 in the Albert Hall the RSPCA held its annual general meeting. Seven thousand supporters attended, among them Queen Victoria, the society's patron since 1835. The society, on behalf of its office-bearers and ninety-two English and Welsh branches, offered the monarch its respectful congratulations on her Jubilee, noting the unprecedented way in which 'the moral and material elevation of our countrymen' had extended during the fifty years of her reign. The Queen, in gracious reply, let it be known that she believed that at least some of the credit for 'the spread of enlightenment' among her subjects was to be attributed to 'the labours of your society'. She was then invited to present the prizes to the winners of a society-sponsored essay competition for schoolchildren contested among 26,000 entrants. In spite of society secretary John Colam's best organisational efforts, proceedings ended in some confusion and the Queen appears to have arrived at her next destination (Paddington station) rather earlier than planned. Press reporting of the event, however, was forgiving, affectionate, even flattering, with at least one editorialist claiming that the 'enormous service' of the society towards achieving a 'transformation' of 'the national character' allowed the English to 'fairly claim to be at the head of all civilised peoples'.¹

By 1887, in short, the RSPCA had become a national institution. RSPCA advice was received with respect by public authorities. More remarkably still, as veteran members could readily recall, RSPCA values had been appropriated as national values. This was the sort of outcome which the most optimistic of the Wilberforce generation of the 1780s could barely have envisioned without disbelief – a society in which the ideal of individual moral responsibility was gladly accepted among citizens, in which the legitimacy of voluntary associational effort was conceded almost unconditionally, in which the privileges of status were widely accepted as having been earned by conscientious discharge of public duty, and in which there flourished a sense of moral community restored. By the 1880s, it was clear, moral reform voluntarism had successfully

¹ *RSPCA Reports*, no. 63 (1887), pp. 81ff., esp pp. 102–10, 116.

entrenched itself as a distinctive – perhaps a defining – characteristic of English public self-image.

The RSPCA, of course, is very much a limiting case. The affection won by one cause did not mean that all moral reform causes enjoyed an equal level of acceptance. Nor did it mean that the moral reform volunteer project was immune to future adjustment of the arena in which public debate was to take place. In fact, to a significant number of moral reform leaders, as we shall now see, the 1880s were to loom as a period of crisis, not just for their preferred causes, but for their customary modes of operation and, to a degree, even for the ideals of citizenship and human personality which underpinned their sense of purpose.

Moral reform stalled: temperance and charity organisation

We may usefully begin by contrasting RSPCA fortunes with the fortunes of a pair of the more controversial, yet determined, moral reform movements of the later Victorian age – the temperance and charity organisation movements. These we can identify as networks of activists who, unlike the RSPCA, had yet to fulfil their mission of moral modernisation but expected by the natural processes of cultural evolution to be able to do so in the relatively near future. Their strategies, however, stood in stark contrast.

The mainstream temperance movement by the 1880s explicitly tied the achievement of its goals to the fortunes of a particular political party. That party was the Gladstonian Liberal Party, the expectant temperance client being the United Kingdom Alliance. As we recall from the previous chapter, there had been times during the recent past when each side had become impatient with the other, yet, by 1880, the UKA had effectively nowhere else to go. The question was no longer one of playing off political parties against each other but of bringing influence to bear on the selection and election of Liberal MPs, and of demonstrating to Liberal leaders that the movement was capable of disciplining its supporters to unite behind ‘moderate’ (and therefore electorally acceptable) goals.

By the time of the 1880 general election, both tasks seemed close to completion. UKA acceptance of the suggestion of Liberal veteran John Bright in 1878 that it campaign for ‘local option’ – that is, not for its own ‘permissive bill’ but for a measure of local government reform to transfer licensing powers from magistrates to ratepayers – seemed for the moment to resolve all dilemmas. The tactic would promote confidence in UKA ranks that a step forward was being taken. At the same time, it would act as a reassurance to temperance activists repelled by the coercive, property-confiscatory aspects of drink-trade abolitionists.² The Liberals duly won the 1880 general election with a greatly

² Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition*, pp. 70–1.

increased representation of temperance supporters in the Commons, among them the president of the UKA (Lawson) and nine of his vice-presidents. Given that the election result also strengthened the representation of Radicals and Nonconformists in the party at the expense of Whigs, it was predictable that one of the first resolutions of the new House of Commons should have been a vote to accept the 'local option' principle.³ The UKA executive immediately declared 18 June 1880 'a memorable day in the history of Temperance Legislation' in the expectation that its 'cabinet friends' would take over the task of translating declaration of principle into law. They were still waiting – though in increasingly restive mood – when the Liberal Party was swept from office after splitting over Irish Home Rule in 1886.

Part of the problem was a failure to find a way of capturing back the legislative agenda from a preoccupied (and only partly converted) executive government. A further obstacle was the sheer number of pressure groups lobbying for parliamentary attention in the lead-up to the further extension of the franchise in 1884–5. (John Bright gave a diplomatic presentation of the problem in 1881 by comparing it to the task of getting 'six or twelve omnibuses abreast through Temple Bar', Lord Derby a more provocative one in 1883 by suggesting that 'no great harm' would be done by letting the issue 'stand over' until all people with an interest in its resolution, agricultural labourers included, were enfranchised to register a direct opinion.⁴) In the meantime, the longer negotiations lasted, the more chance there was that the major temperance organisations would disagree over the definition and finality of the 'local option' goal.⁵ As matters finally resolved themselves, the UKA found itself carried helplessly to short-term electoral disaster in 1886, along with the Liberal Party itself. Whether this affected the self-confidence and resilience of temperance activists at local level seems doubtful. For temperance national elites, however, it was a moment of extreme frustration.

Frustration – perhaps not quite so acute, but severe enough – was also an emotion familiar enough to charity organisation leaders by 1886. In contrast to the UKA, Charity Organisation Society leaders of the 1880s were scrupulous in distancing themselves from party politics. That gave them protection against the sort of strategic collapse which overtook the Liberal-linked UKA. It was, however, a strategy with its own drawbacks. Most simply, of course, it cut the COS off from sources of grass-roots energy available to other organisations. ('The Society tried to stand neutral in religion, in politics, and in social questions, and therefore failed to enlist partisans', explained its now securely established secretary, C. S. Loch, before a special meeting of the COS Council in 1885.⁶) And even non-partisanship did not protect the society from a steady

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86–9, 93–5.

⁶ 'The Charity Organisation Society: Its Progress', *Charity Organisation Review*, 1 (1885), p. 157.

stream of criticism of its work from its old enemies in the more 'traditional' or 'sentimental' sections of the world of charitable action. '[U]npopularity was inevitable' if consistency of principle was to be upheld, added Loch in his 1885 review. Yet, as the 1880s began, hope remained strong that patient education of charitable givers and receivers would eventually persuade both groups of the benevolence and necessity of finding a modern definition of 'true charity' to reconcile Christian duty with responsible social outcomes.⁷

The hopes of COS leaders were focused on two lines of tactical advance. The first was a consolidation of relations between the Society and public officials. This involved Society members standing for election to local boards of guardians or to school boards, or recruiting local board members to COS district committees.⁸ More intangibly, but probably more effectively, it also involved the society through its publications acting as agenda-setters among local administrative and ecclesiastical elites – shaping opinion on what needed to be done to encourage, repress or guide the distribution of charitable relief at the potential crisis points of the charity year.⁹

The second line of advance was by way of increased effort to professionalise the administration of voluntary charitable activity in general. The question of subjecting local volunteers to professional standards of consistency was naturally a delicate one and, on this front, Loch was still prepared to admit that, given a tension between enthusiasm and competence, it was preferable to encourage active citizenship at the expense of 'getting a decision to square with the [COS District] Committee's ideas'.¹⁰ Nonetheless, determination to entrench a system of relief recommended only after full inquiry drove the COS steadily towards the implementation of schemes to standardise oversight over volunteers even if the provision of formal training for case workers themselves was delayed until 1897. It was this determination which lay behind the decision made in 1883 to professionalise the key position of district secretary.¹¹ The precedent was now set.

The results of this 'professionalising' approach to moral reform were, by 1885, mixed. It was certainly true that, by that time, a substantial network of societies claiming to promote charity organisation had come into existence across the country. The extent to which they implemented COS principles in practice was not entirely clear. Many (including key provincial societies in

⁷ *Ibid.* (Loch). See also *CO Reporter*, 22 April 1880, p. 95 (Lord Derby).

⁸ Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work*, pp. 49–51.

⁹ Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 279–80; and see Sir C. Trevelyan's justification of the role, *CO Review*, 1 (1885), p. 156.

¹⁰ *CO Review*, 1 (1885), p. 157.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 150–1. For the realities of high visitor turnover in 1880s COS home-visiting activities, see G. Behlmer, 'Character Building and the English Family', in G. Behlmer and F. Leventhal (eds.), *Singular Continuities. Tradition, Nostalgia and Identity in Modern British Culture* (Stanford CA, 2000), pp. 64–5.

Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham) led a double existence as relief-raising as well as relief-monitoring agencies – a ‘muddle’ of priorities which the central council deplored in principle but tolerated in practice. Council promotion of the cause of professionalisation also had its limits of effectiveness: as occasional provincial contributors to organisational debate pointed out, professionalisation, while appropriate for London conditions, often fell far beyond the needs or resources of non-metropolitan communities.¹² Such criticisms may well have strengthened London’s self-confidence rather than the reverse. The train of events which was, temporarily, to have a more dramatic impact on London’s self-confidence was, though, London-based and centred on the claims of the society to have brought about a permanent change in the culture of metropolitan charitable relief.

In hindsight, COS metropolitan ‘success’ in the 1870s and early 80s had always been a fragile achievement, heavily underpinned by unusually buoyant trade conditions and by mild winters. As noted above, however, London COS leaders prided themselves on their part in the public redefinition of the legitimate circumstances of charity distribution. The campaign to restrict the relief given to the able-bodied which they had waged in company with East End poor law authorities during the 1870s seemed, by the early 1880s to have entrenched a new attitude of responsibility among givers and receivers alike. Then came the severe winter of 1885–6. The sudden reversion to more primitive and spontaneous public giving patterns – and to more strident East End relief-demanding patterns – which occurred during that winter, therefore, hit hard. The Revd Samuel Barnett, Octavia Hill’s one-time disciple in charity organisation (now vicar of St Jude’s, Whitechapel), was appalled. Writing in the aftermath of the launching of the first Lord Mayor’s relief fund in nineteen years, a fund swollen by contributions made in panic after the February 1886 smashing of West End club windows by ‘the mob’, Barnett for the moment despaired. The ‘steady flow of goodwill directed towards real needs’ and given by ‘the long service of many who gave better than money’ had been swamped. The result was the rewarding of the idle, the betrayal of duty to the needy trained to show ‘bravery and independence’, and, therefore, the reignition of ‘greater class hatred’. In such conditions ‘The servants of the poor break their hearts. They see the work of years undone . . . and they lose hope.’¹³ Others kept their nerve and moved to ensure that COS principles were adequately observed in future relief appeals, but most would have agreed with C. S. Loch that there appeared to be no

¹² Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law*, pp. 95–100. There were forty metropolitan committees by the end of 1885: *CO Review*, 1 (1885), p. 79; for provincial societies, see Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law*, ch. 5; Behlmer, ‘Character Building’, pp. 65–7.

¹³ Barnett to *The Times*, 7 March 1886, quoted in Bosanquet, *Social Work in London*, pp. 323–4. Cf. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 297–8.

reliable ‘short cuts to reform’, even for the apolitical, professionally oriented COS.¹⁴

Moral reform refired: social purity

Movements such as temperance and charity organisation faced society with a degree of frustrated impatience as that society proved more difficult to move than they had hoped. Yet at least participants could console themselves with the belief that their vision of society transformed was in harmony with reasonable medium-term expectation – that history was on their side. This was not a consolation so readily available to recruits to a new set of moral reform associations which exploded into public action in the early 1880s. The new cause was ‘social purity’ – a commitment to the promotion of chastity, the protection of the ‘innocent’, and the acceptance of an ‘equal standard’ of sexual responsibility for both men and women.

Social purity was an issue with resonances readily recognisable by those brought up in the tradition of previous moral reform campaigns of a symbolically articulated sort. For males pledging themselves to chastity before marriage the act of public witness undertaken was one often familiar enough from a previous context: indeed, social purity organisers sometimes deliberately planned to recruit from the reservoir of candidates which temperance meetings provided.¹⁵ For women rescue workers attempting to dismantle the barriers of class and culture between themselves and women working as prostitutes, the conceptualising of prostitution as ‘white slavery’ also helped to give a sense of reassurance – a ‘lineage’ of moral respectability, albeit one which carried its own burden of cultural association in the longer term as its implied ‘racial’ basis sometimes made overt. As adoption of the term confirmed, the whole concept of ‘slavery’ and the series of analogies which had been drawn from it was, potentially, an open-ended one.¹⁶ That said, the emergence of social purity was obviously far more than an extension of an imprinted set of thought patterns. And even to the extent that it was, those thought patterns gave no certain forecast of victory – just the duty of bearing witness against injustice and sin.

Indeed, in the mid-1870s, when social purity first crystallised as an issue of concern to an inner circle of Contagious Diseases Acts repeal campaigners,

¹⁴ *CO Review*, 1 (1885), p. 157. The COS declined to appoint a representative to the 1886 Mansion House Fund central committee (*CO Review*, 2 (1886), p. 109) but set up its own ‘Special Committee on Exceptional Distress’ which drew up rules for the ‘unostentatious’ supplementation of funds of existing volunteer relief agencies whenever a panel of informed observers should advise the Lord Mayor of its necessity. These rules were broadly adopted by City authorities from the winter of 1886–7 onwards (*CO Review*, 2 (1886), pp. 182–3, 404–6, 432).

¹⁵ [Jane] Ellice Hopkins, *The White Cross Army* (1883), pp. 10, 14.

¹⁶ Cf. Searle, *Morality and the Market*, pp. 64–71.

it was conceptualised in the millennialist language of moral desperation. Josephine Butler and her allies, deprived of what access they had to official policy-making circles by the fall of the Gladstone government, took stock of the situation and ‘suddenly became aware’ that it was even more threatening than they had realised. Focused as they had been on the politics of the English situation, they had failed to recognise signs of the emergence of ‘an international system’ of state-regulated vice, entrenched by law and serviced by ‘a kind of International League of the Doctors’.¹⁷ The integration of European economies, it seemed, had outflanked the moral defences of Christian (if sinful) England. By the end of 1875, Mrs Butler was confiding to Quaker and Unitarian friends in repeal circles that ‘the words of the Scriptures had constantly been before her mind; “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it”’.¹⁸ Shortly afterwards she left for the continent in order to mobilise what support she could find (chiefly Protestant), in transit also paying a visit to the symbolic centre of the empire of lust, the bureau of the Paris *police des mœurs*.¹⁹

Behind her she left a variety of organisations, some (the Vigilance Association) charged with political tasks to perform, others (the Social Purity Alliance) with educational goals. None, however, had significant public support beyond its core of overlapping names. (These were the Shaens of London Unitarianism, the Bright–McLaren–Lucas clan of northern Ladies’ National Association supporters, the James Stuarts and George Warrs of radical Liberal circles in the ancient universities.) Furthermore, the tactical advice given by the respected political patron of ‘equality before the law’ voluntarists, James Stansfeld, was giving encouragement to prostitute-reclamation experiments which, in many instances, drew into the movement people of (by Millite moral autonomist standards) doubtfully libertarian credentials. The most widely known and successful of these was the Evangelical churchwoman, Ellice Hopkins, who, in 1875 from her base in Brighton, began a campaign of ‘preventive and rescue work’ in provincial England, a campaign quickly institutionalised by her supporters into a network of Ladies’ Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls. By 1885 Hopkins was able to claim support in 106 locations.²⁰ However, social purity was not a movement confined to Churchwomen and it becomes significant to note for future reference the way in which Nonconformists from about the same moment at last started to accustom themselves to the idea of the godly

¹⁷ *The New Abolitionists: A Narrative of a Year’s Work. Being an Account of the Mission Undertaken to the Continent of Europe by Mrs. Josephine E. Butler* (1876), pp. 2–3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10. The biblical reference is to Revelation 3: 8. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁰ Hopkins, *Ladies Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls*, pp. 3–4, 20–1; R. Barrett, *Ellice Hopkins. A Memoir* (1907), pp. 109, 115–16; P. Bartley, *Prostitution. Prevention and Reform in England, 1860–1914* (2000), pp. 73–4. For contrasting general appraisals, see Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, pp. 119–26; S. Morgan, ‘Faith, Sex and Purity: The Religio-Feminist Theory of Ellice Hopkins’, *Women’s History Review* 9 (1), (2000), pp. 13–34.

community protected by (rather than against) state power.²¹ All this activity, however, remained overshadowed in public debate by the CD Acts repeal issue, and even more by the publicity attracted by Gladstone's efforts to 'moralise' the terms of political debate by his 'Bulgarian horrors' campaign of 1876 and Midlothian campaign of 1879. This was soon to change.

Late in 1879, 'one Sabbath evening', as he was leaving the Friends' Meeting House, Clerkenwell, the Quaker publisher and CD Acts repealer, Alfred Dyer, heard from a friend the story of 'a young English girl . . . confined in a licensed house of prostitution in Brussels [who] was contemplating suicide as the only means of escape from her awful condition'.²² Following up this story through a Brussels Protestant clergyman already in correspondence with British repealers, he managed to have the twenty-year-old woman released from the infectious diseases hospital where she was by then confined, and brought to London. There she told a story of having been decoyed out of England 'under a promise of marriage', then taken to Brussels and tricked into signing registration papers which had the effect of making her 'as much a slave as was ever any negro upon Virginian soil.'²³ The story convinced Dyer of the need to make his own trip of investigation. Accompanied by the Quaker banker George Gillett, and assisted by the Congregationalist chamberlain of the City of London, Benjamin Scott, Dyer made his own visit to Brussels in February 1880, returning to England with another released girl of eighteen who this time told a story extending beyond deception to medical cruelty and police complicity with the trade. This narrative of liberation was not to go unchallenged: a British consular official also involved in these events was later to point out with indignation that most English girls found in Brussels brothels were less than sexual innocents on arrival, to suggest that this one was capable of 'invention . . . to evoke sympathy', and to argue that Dyer's exposure of this particular case had led directly to her exemplary imprisonment by the Belgian authorities for making a false declaration of age.²⁴ The London group, in co-operation with

²¹ See, e.g., Josephine Butler's unease with the coercive approach to consensual sexual behaviour revealed by some of her Nonconformist allies as reported in James Stuart to H. J. Wilson, 11 Aug. 1875, Josephine Butler papers, The Women's Library, London. Note also the growing willingness of leading Wesleyan Methodists to endorse state intervention at this time: *New Abolitionists*, pp. 168–72 (arrival of the Buntings in the social purity movement); and see generally Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, pp. 11–17.

²² Alfred S. Dyer, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls. A Narrative of Facts* (6th edn, 1882), p. 6; and see variant versions in HL SC on the Law relating to the Protection of Young Girls, PP 1881 (448), ix.459, and *London Committee for the Exposure and Suppression of the Traffic in English Girls for Purposes of Continental Prostitution. Reports*, no. 4 (1885), p. 1.

²³ Dyer, *Narrative*, p. 7. The identification of this case as that of Ellen Newland is made by deduction from evidence submitted to SC on Protection of Young Girls in PP 1881 (448), ix.

²⁴ Dyer, *Narrative*, pp. 23–7; cf. PP 1881 (448), ix.396–8. The barrister appointed to investigate the allegations eventually tabled a list of thirty-three known cases of English subjects under 21 in continental brothels, 1871–9. One was 14, three 15, two 16, and the others 17–20: PP 1881 (448), ix.489.

Mrs Butler and the British and Continental Association, were sufficiently alarmed by the cumulative evidence they now possessed about an emerging pattern of demand for teenage girls as prostitutes (both in London and abroad) to use the opportunity now presented. The informal conferences of individuals who had monitored the emerging situation were, in April 1880, formally organised as the London Committee for the Exposure and Suppression of the Traffic in English Girls for Purposes of Continental Prostitution. Dyer published *A Narrative of Facts*, a copy of which was 'placed in the hands of each member of our Government, and of both Houses of Parliament'; and the London Committee, in co-operation with Mrs Butler's circle, mobilised one thousand supporters for a ladies' memorial to the Foreign Secretary.²⁵

The first direct beneficiary of the climate of moral urgency so created was in fact not a member of the London Committee at all, but the Ladies' Association sponsor, Ellice Hopkins. (Her proposal to give magistrates the power to commit girls under fourteen to an industrial school if 'found associating with prostitutes' was passed without debate by parliament in July 1880.²⁶) But London feminist and CD Act repeal circles were not appeased. (Indeed the 'Ellice Hopkins clause' enraged the more libertarian of them as yet another example of a male parliament penalising the victim – the prostitute-mother – rather than the client.) In May 1881 they finally got their way – a government-approved House of Lords select committee to review 'the law relating to the protection of young girls'.²⁷

What had ensured this degree of success, and to what extent did it ensure further success in the cause? Most obviously, success was the result of dealing with a more sympathetic government since the return of Gladstone to power in April 1880. Among Gladstone's backbenchers were an unprecedented number of Nonconformists and libertarian radicals, expectant (as we have already seen in relation to temperance) that this was a government which at last would represent the public interest as they, from their previously marginalised position, perceived it. Like the supporters of temperance, social purity activists were eventually to become restive about the commitment of the Liberal leadership to legislative action. Yet on one issue the Gladstone government was to give major satisfaction: in April 1883 it allowed James Stansfeld to sponsor a resolution of the House of Commons which permanently suspended the operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts.²⁸ (They were formally repealed by the Gladstone government in 1886.)

Radical Nonconformity was, however, not the only interest group barking at the government's heels; nor were Nonconformists themselves entirely certain

²⁵ *London Committee. Reports*, no. 1, pp. 7, 13–15, 22–3; no. 4, p. 13; Dyer, *Narrative*, p. 2.

²⁶ *PD* 3ser., ccliv.995–6.

²⁷ *PD* 3ser., cclxi.1603–13, esp. 1613 (Granville). Cf. Scott's later allegations of near-exclusion from the committee's inquiries: *The Christian*, 1885, p. 932.

²⁸ McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 210–23.

of their ability to maintain their momentum in the face of a challenge from political forces even further to the left, and this was another major shaping influence on the emerging situation. For the more excitable the challenge appeared to be increasingly one of ideology: 'I have never known so sudden an outburst of socialistic feeling as occurred in 1883–84', wrote Samuel Smith, the Gladstone-worshipping MP for Liverpool. '[Henry George's] *Progress and Poverty* became a sort of Bible with multitudes. George appeared to them a second Moses to lead the suffering Israel of the nineteenth century out of . . . Egyptian bondage.'²⁹ The impact of such experiences superimposed on direct experience of urban deprivation through charity visiting during the 1870s, and on unease at the onset of industrial depression in the period following 1875, led Smith to a direct call for 'wise and paternal government' as an antidote to the social effects of 'the rapacity and greed' of 'traders in human corruption'.³⁰ He was not alone in Nonconformist ranks (1883 was also the year of the publication of the classic Nonconformist exposé of material deprivation and reappraisal of state responsibility in a market-organised society, Andrew Mearns' *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*³¹). Others with wider experience of public life treated the situation more tactically, but even they looked forward to the apparently now inevitable further democratisation of the national franchise with hitherto uncharacteristic ambivalence.

Where you become democratic, you lose the blessings – although some of you may be rather amused with the idea – you lose the blessings of Whig rule. The Whigs had a sense of the limits of the power which they could rightly or safely exercise to legislate or control, because of the restricted suffrage of past times; but we in this country are now somewhat losing such a sense of the limits of the rightful power of Parliament to legislate, and of governments to govern.

Thus the hero of the Nonconformist libertarian left, James Stansfeld, preaching to the converted at the 1884 annual general meeting of the Vigilance Association.³²

This destabilisation of political expectation was to have a galvanising effect on the course of debate on 'social purity'. In one direction it was to feed propertyed apprehension about the future of property rights and public order. In another direction it helped to encourage the view that social purity goals should be presented as the 'cause of the people' or, more equivocally, as the cause the people would adopt if only they knew the facts. In yet a further direction, it

²⁹ Samuel Smith, *My Life-Work* (1902), p. 148.

³⁰ 'It was in that frame of mind that I entered Parliament [1882]', he recalled: Smith, *Life-Work*, p. 110.

³¹ Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1st edn 1883; reprinted 1970), esp. pp. 18–20. (Note: the editor of the reprint, W. H. Chaloner, identifies the pamphlet as the production of a fellow Congregationalist minister and journalist, acting as 'ghostwriter' for Mearns.)

³² *Vigilance Association Journal*, no. 38 (1884), p. 20.

was to lead some (and feminists in particular) to a sometimes desperate sense of the need to complete the transaction of business under the existing system for fear that democratisation would mean an even greater degree of political marginalisation. In all three instances the effect was to intensify a focus on the protection of 'childhood innocence' as the symbolic test of 'the moral tone of England'.³³

The effect of these developments on the organisational history of social purity was both galvanising and disruptive. On the one hand, as just noted, the issue became one with potentially 'national' symbolic implications. On the other hand, it intensified anxiety among leaders of existing sectional communities about their ability to 'project' their own point of view into an uncertain future.

As we have already seen, the actual number of committed and informed social purity campaigners was relatively small until 1881. The London Committee for Suppression of the Traffic in Young Girls had achieved its lobbying of government with a subscribing membership of 171, leaving the actual collection of signatures of support for its cause to existing CD Acts repeal networks. The committee executive was also a grouping of rather restricted occupational background, being dominated by bankers, barristers and publishers, all of them London residents. It did, however, include women members, and it was pan-evangelical (though dominated by Nonconformists).³⁴ This was a sign of things to come.

It was, by the same measure, a sign of the breadth of the social purity movement that there was at least one strand within it which felt able to launch itself without seeking the help either of women or of Nonconformists. This was the Central Vigilance Committee for the Repression of Immorality. Officially inaugurated in June 1883, it traced its origins in practice to a series of early 1880s parish-based metropolitan brothel repression campaigns funded and organised by the 'respectable inhabitants'.³⁵ Campaigns such as these would readily have been understood by Reformation of Manners Societies of the 1690s and indeed the precedent was cited with respect by the committee's founders.³⁶ The chief goal of the committee was 'To arouse public opinion, and form Local Vigilance Committees' to assist public authorities to enforce laws against street solicitation and brothels.³⁷

³³ For the phrase, see Ellice Hopkins in *Seeking and Saving. A Monthly Journal of Home Mission and Penitentiary Work*, 3 (1883), p. 161.

³⁴ For committee details, see *London Committee. Reports*, no. 1, pp. 5, 13; for full membership list, see *ibid.*, no. 2 (1882), pp. 35–7.

³⁵ For inaugural meeting, see *Seeking and Saving*, 3 (1883), pp. 166, 175. See Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 131–2, 148, for context.

³⁶ *Central Vigilance Committee for the Repression of Immorality. [CVC] Annual Report (1884)*, pp. 4, 15–20. For pre-CVC 1880s London parish vigilance activities, see *Seeking and Saving*, 3 (1883), pp. 43–4, 75–6; *Sentinel*, July and Dec. 1881, pp. 64–6: 'Association for the Improvement of Public Morals'.

³⁷ *CVC. Annual Report (1884)*, p. 2.

The key organiser of the movement was the West End parish clergyman, the Revd H. W. Webb-Peploe, an Evangelical also well known in his day as a leader of the Keswick movement for spiritual renewal. Webb-Peploe's networks of support were extensive. They included not only the 'large attendance' of MPs and representatives of 'the Clerical, Medical, and Legal Professions, Magistrates, and Residents' reported present at the inaugural meeting, but also the eighteen groups across a significant part of urban England (the north included) reported to be in correspondence with the central committee by 1884. Financial support was provided by, among others, such metropolitan charity veterans as Lord Lichfield and the duke of Westminster, as well as the Lord Mayor of London, R. N. Fowler MP (also a leading actor at much the same time in the founding of the Church of England Purity Society).³⁸ The penalty paid for such distinguished support was eventual accusation from Nonconformists that the committee was a triumph of 'social prestige' over 'practical use', though it is clear that there were also committed grass-roots supporters (principally shopkeepers) as well.³⁹ More damaging for future prospects was the inability of the committee to find a role for women in its work, a fact of which its leaders were uneasily aware from the first.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it had, by 1883, both a constituency and a direct line of contact to parliamentary circles (most notably through key members of the House of Lords select committee, Lords Shaftesbury and Mount-Temple) which it used energetically during the debates on brothel suppression and street solicitation which formed part of the Lords select committee's recommendations for law reform.⁴¹

If the Central Vigilance Committee looked to ancient precedent for legitimacy, another group of social purity associations was more concerned to stake a claim to the moral high ground as part of a strategy of adjustment to the expected future. We have already noted the alarm of some Nonconformists that their agenda might be outflanked by a new agenda of 'socialism'. On the evidence of social purity activism, this anxiety was not confined to Nonconformists. The possibilities opened up by a democratised future alarmed Churchmen as much if not more. The problem for Churchmen, however, was complicated by the perception that the enthusiasm of radical Nonconformists for Church disestablishment made them as often the allies of confiscatory socialism as

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 5.

³⁹ For critics of CVC social exclusivity, see *Sentinel*, 1885, p. 503. For evidence of grass-roots support, see *Annual Report* (1884), pp. 13–14, but cf. pp. 18–19. It is also worth noting that activists included a handful of prominent metropolitan Nonconformists, notably the Congregationalists Benjamin Scott and Samuel Morley MP: *ibid.*, p. 2; *Seeking and Saving*, 3 (1883), p. 44.

⁴⁰ *Seeking and Saving*, 3 (1883), pp. 75 (vicar of St Jude's, King's Cross), 475. CVC objectives did include the demand that street solicitation be made an offence for males as well as for females, but this did not impress later critics such as the Methodist Percy Bunting: *Sentinel*, 1885, p. 475, or the libertarian feminist, J. H. Levy of the VA: *Vigilance Association Journal*, Jan. 1884, p. 2.

⁴¹ HL SC on Protection of Young Girls: Report, *PP* 1882 (344), xiii.826ff.

fellow Protestants or fellow Christians. Neither Nonconformists nor Churchmen could easily avoid taking a stand on social purity. Indeed, as we shall see, many saw it as an opportunity to show the continuing relevance of religion in a class-fragmented, market-driven society. Yet, as competitors in that society, they could not afford to be too ecumenical either.⁴² The result was the emergence during 1883–4 of three separate social purity mass-member associations, each with a distinctive ecclesiastical identity.

The first two of these associations to be founded were Church-linked societies. This was probably an indication of the increased voluntary energy the Church was showing as it faced the double challenge of the disestablishment threat and of adaptation to being ‘the Church of the Empire’.⁴³ The more directly Church-linked of the two bodies was the Church of England Purity Society (CEPS), founded in May 1883 at Lambeth by a meeting of Church dignitaries (clerical and lay) in response to a call from various Church elites for a corporate scheme ‘to promote Purity and to prevent the Degradation of Women and Children’.⁴⁴ It helped that the House of Commons resolution of the previous month had removed the Contagious Diseases Acts from the top of the social purity agenda, but Church conversion to the cause of ‘raising the standard of public opinion on the obligation of purity among men’ had been under way since the late 1870s and had most forcibly been drawn to the attention of Church leaders as a challenge to their ‘moral credibility’ by Ellice Hopkins in an impassioned speech at the 1882 Church Congress.⁴⁵

As was to be expected from such a self-consciously corporate initiative, leadership was kept securely within the ranks of senior clergy, MPs and distinguished men in professional life. The Church’s duty as the Church of the example-setting classes was emphasised by the leading role played by headmasters, college heads from Oxford and Cambridge and naval officers.⁴⁶ The opportunity for national elites to use social purity as a symbolic assertion of their continuing fitness to lead was an explicitly acknowledged part of the argument for action. ‘There was no mistaking that our men were kindled by the thought of standing shoulder to shoulder with their brethren of the humbler classes in

⁴² For an example of a Church leader ‘privately’ admitting this, see *Church of England Purity Society*. [CEPS] Reports, no. 1 [Report of the Inaugural Meeting, Lambeth Palace, 25 May, 1883], p. 26 (Bishop Wilkinson of Truro).

⁴³ A. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (1976), chs. 6–7.

⁴⁴ *CEPS Report*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Church Congress Reports* 21 (1882), pp. 569–73. Church congresses were the ecclesiastical equivalents of Social Science Association meetings, established partly in imitation. Note also Archbishop Benson’s adoption of social purity as a theme in his enthronement sermon: *CEPS Report*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Foundation committee list in *CEPS Report*, pp. 12–13. Note also the co-option of existing social purity activists, if Churchmen (e.g., Bullen, secretary of the Social Purity Alliance; Webb-Peploe, organiser of the CVC).

one work for this great cause', reported Warden Talbot of Keble of the effect of an appeal by Ellice Hopkins to Oxford undergraduates.⁴⁷

The eagerness of Oxford undergraduates to engage in a competitive display of moral credentials with other strata in English society becomes easier to understand once we note that, even before the CEPS was organised, Ellice Hopkins had been achieving a remarkable degree of enthusiasm for 'the old, deep, chivalrous feeling of an Englishman toward woman' among the coal miners of County Durham. At the invitation of an old Cambridge acquaintance, J. B. Lightfoot, now bishop of Durham, Hopkins had experimented in February 1883 with an adaptation of well-tried temperance pledging techniques at a males-only meeting of 'pitmen and clerks' at Bishop Auckland. Confronted with Hopkins' presentation of the degradation which male lust inflicted on women, 108 of an audience of 300 came forward to register a commitment 'To treat all women with respect, and endeavour to protect them from wrong and degradation' and 'To fulfil the command, "Keep thyself pure"'.⁴⁸ The bishop had hoped to assist the formation of 'a higher and purer public opinion, which will crystallize out in right legislation and right action': the result of the meeting and of even larger ones following was to convince Hopkins that an aroused male working class was in fact a more reliable reservoir of 'solemnity and earnestness' than could be found among other ranks: '[I]t is with the upper class that the risk always lies.'⁴⁹

Of course, there was a certain degree of organisational irregularity which needed to be accepted if northern working men were to be kept on side. Hopkins' White Cross Army, until its merger with the CEPS in 1891, had at its 'centre', therefore, not an executive committee but a purely advisory 'council of reference', and, by 1885, Hopkins was openly arguing that the distinction between it and the CEPS was merely a tactical one: the CEPS was the organisation of choice where the clergy could be persuaded to sponsor a branch, but the White Cross Army was the way forward in communities where the clergy could not be moved, or where 'as in the North, Dissent is so strong that it is felt to be best to form a mixed committee'.⁵⁰

Under these circumstances it was only a matter of time before a Nonconformist riposte was made, and the voluntary association necessarily invented

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Hopkins, *White Cross Army*, p. 8. The pledges used were a simplified version of pledges devised for an upper-middle-class London parish by Canon George Wilkinson, by 1883 bishop of Truro. Fifteen thousand pledges had been made by 1885 according to E. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance. Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Dublin, 1977), p. 104 (though with no source given). Cf. the struggle of the CEPS to gain 600 subscribers to its central funds in 1885: *Seeking and Saving*, 5 (1885), p. 17.

⁴⁹ Ellice Hopkins, *The Present Moral Crisis. An Appeal to Women* (1886), p. 18.

⁵⁰ Ellice Hopkins, *The Purity Movement* (1885), pp. 18–19. The White Cross 'council of reference' was a virtual sub-committee of the CEPS – a list of clergy, public school headmasters and Oxbridge figures led by the bishop of Truro: p. 20.

to carry the rival standard duly emerged at the end of 1884. The Gospel Purity Association, launched in December of that year, announced its objects to be 'with one or two verbal alterations . . . identical with those of the White Cross Army'. In one respect it was able to outflank its Church model: it was able to organise a women's union to complement the work of the all-male Purity Association.⁵¹ Its official sponsors included the original Quaker social purity investigators, Gillett and Dyer, in co-operation with the evangelical publisher, R. C. Morgan.⁵² In practice, its chief public face became its secretary, the Salvation Army officer, James Wookey, a male equivalent of Ellice Hopkins in public presence, with a tendency to rely far more openly than she on a rhetoric of 'class oppression'. When, in 1885, Wookey was invited to speak in Manchester, the response was galvanic:

We had 6,000 working men in the Free Trades Hall and hundreds could not get in. Mr Wookey rivetted the attention of his audience for an hour and a half with the most appalling histories of injustice, crime, and oppression. The men were simply wild with indignation at the statements he made, and the devilry perpetrated in the land.⁵³

This was acceptance of the politics of democracy 'with a vengeance', it might be said. It was also the result of the politics of denominational mobilisation.

What, finally, of those involved in purity work who looked forward to the politics of democracy with less enthusiasm? There were, in practice, two varieties of 'moral anxiety' distinguishable among these activists. The first stemmed from a concern that new citizens were not always educated enough to know their own best interest. (We have met examples of this type of response already when evaluating the impact of the Reform Act of 1867.) The second stemmed from fear that the coming of male democracy would marginalise the voice of the still excluded (women most notably) to an extent intolerable to contemplate.

The most notable example of a moral reform cause driven forward largely by concern for the protection of the urban masses from their own inadequacies was the movement, set up at last with RSPCA assistance, for the prevention of cruelty to children. It might be asked – indeed it was wondered by some mid-Victorians – why there was a sixty-year delay between the founding of the one and the emergence of a formal organisation pledged to child protection.⁵⁴ The answer lies deeply embedded in Victorian commitment to the family as the 'natural', indeed only effective, site of moral socialisation.

Yet, by 1880, as we have now seen, certain sections of Evangelical middle-class opinion were starting to make exceptions when faced with evidence of

⁵¹ *Sentinel*, 1886, pp. 37–8. Cf. criticism of CEPS for unwillingness to harness female energies: *CEPS Report*, pp. 39–40 (James Stuart); *Seeking and Saving*, 3 (1883), p. 228 (Ellice Hopkins).

⁵² *Sentinel*, 1885, p. 377. For a full committee list, see *Sentinel*, 1886, pp. 37–8. For the activity of individual Nonconformists predating 1884, see Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, p. 104.

⁵³ *Christian*, 9 July 1885, p. 530. ⁵⁴ Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, p. 68.

working-class family dysfunction. The ‘Ellice Hopkins Act’ of that year quite clearly placed the preservation of ‘childhood innocence’ above respect for parental rights. At the same time, school board officials and charity organisers, who had been gathering increasingly complete records of urban working-class family behaviour since the early 1870s, were also starting to wonder aloud what responsibility the state might have to accept for the physical and educational quality of potential future citizens. On the evidence of Samuel Smith, the Liverpool businessman who played a key part in the founding of the earliest child cruelty prevention societies, ‘As I became increasingly familiar with the huge mass of child misery in Liverpool – mainly the product of drunken homes – I came to see that the great problem for the future of our country was to save the children’.⁵⁵ As is evident, Smith’s focus of concern here was big-city child neglect and parental brutality rather than sexual vulnerability. Significantly, however, it was not until the era of social purity had established itself and the shadow of franchise extension had fallen across public life that activists such as Smith managed to convince public authorities to support their specific goals. (As late as 1881 Lord Shaftesbury wrote to Smith’s chief co-worker admitting that, while it was impossible to be unaware of child maltreatment, individual acts of cruelty or neglect were still conceived of in political circles as being ‘of so private, internal, and domestic a character as to be beyond the reach of legislation’.⁵⁶) The breakthrough came during 1881–2, not in London but in Liverpool, not as an offshoot of social purity or CD Acts repeal networks but of the local RSPCA.⁵⁷ It was a sign of the times that the Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children on its foundation in April 1883 defined cruelty to include ‘conduct . . . by which morals are imperilled or depraved’ as well as neglect, infliction of excessive physical pain and the wrongful endangering of health or safety.⁵⁸ It was also the case that the priorities of the parallel society launched in July 1884 in London became for a time skewed towards the specific task of agitating for the criminalisation of child sexual abuse.⁵⁹ Behind this front, however, there lay in both cases a coalition of local officials, magistrates, elected education board representatives and voluntary relief leaders which had been waiting a decade for an opportunity to discipline the chaotic

⁵⁵ Smith, *Life-Work*, p. 90; see also Benjamin Waugh, *The Gaol Cradle. Who Rocks It?* (1873), pp. 139–44; HL SC on Protection of Young Girls, *PP* 1882 (344), xiii.857 (Q. 221, Cdr. Eaton, Liverpool school board).

⁵⁶ Quoted in Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50–4. Behlmer stresses the prominence of ‘law and order’ issues in explaining Liverpool ‘precocity’ (p. 49) but it seems more useful to draw attention to the sectarian nature of Liverpool public life which ensured that, if social action was to be initiated successfully, it needed to be corporately based with full representation of all interest groups simultaneously.

⁵⁸ *Liverpool Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Reports*, no. 1 (1883), p. 3; Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, p. 55; see also the London definition of objects at pp. 66–7. A major focus of practical attention was child street-traders and beggars.

⁵⁹ Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, pp. 73–7.

lives of the ‘residuum’ (as they were coming to be called), and it was not going to put its chance of acceptance at risk by inviting backlash. Foundation committees were, therefore, models of inclusion, Protestant serving with Catholic, Churchman with Nonconformist, male with female.⁶⁰ As far as was possible, child protection was presented to the public as a natural adaptation of the work of the now nationally revered RSPCA, with activists presented as ‘the heirs to much of the excellent educational work which had been done by that most excellent society’.⁶¹

This reliance on the support of magistrates, mayors and administrative elites was not an option open to those voluntarists most alienated from the existing and likely future political order – CD Acts repealers and feminists. It was possible, with a leap of faith in the long term, to make an appeal to the ultimate effects of education on received public opinion. This is what the Social Purity Alliance had been doing since 1873, with its Unitarian-led attempts to persuade young men of the justice of ‘but one law of purity for men and women alike’.⁶² Such work needed to be complemented, of course, by the monitoring of state encroachment on the ‘constitutional rights’ of the individual in the meantime. This is what the Vigilance Association had been set up to do in 1871 and, as a further extension of the franchise loomed, it set out with gloomy relish to educate new voters about how to avoid being bribed into moral dependency by government use of their own taxes.⁶³

Over the issue of social purity, however, the leaders of the Vigilance Association faced a problem. They were prepared to concede that, in the medium term, while women struggled to regain their self-confidence as morally autonomous individuals, state protection might be appropriate. Yet “‘Protection” is an ominous word in British politics. Like charity, it covers a multitude of sins, but scarcely in the sense of compensation.’ The Vigilance Association was especially caustic about the work of volunteers apparently trying to prolong childhood dependency. Ellice Hopkins it publicly described as ‘the woman who seeks popularity among men by urging them to lock up girls in order to put a

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 54–5, 65–6.

⁶¹ *Liverpool SPCC. Reports*, no. 1 (1883), p. 12 (Frederick Agnew); see also *London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Reports*, no. 2 (1886), p. 57: appendix VI, ‘Origin of the LSPCC’. The ability of the London society to tap the same sources of support as the RSPCA is clear from its inaugural committee list (*Report* no. 1 (2nd edn, 1885), pp. 3–4), and from its buoyant income levels (£903 in 1884, £2,099 by 1886), though its subscriber base remained small (213 in 1885).

⁶² Stansfeld at SPA 1884 annual meeting, *Seeking and Saving*, 4 (1884), p. 159. The SPA claimed a leap in membership from 900 to 3,166 between 1879–80 and 1885–6, though this may have been no more than a count of attendance at its meetings. A more accurate count might be the totals of ‘new members’ recorded: 1880–1 – 258; 1882–3 – 588; 1885–6 – 311 (*Sentinel*, July 1881, p. 18; July 1883, p. 265; July 1886, p. 79).

⁶³ *Vigilance Assoc. Journal*, Jan. 1885, p. 3.

stop to moral mischief'.⁶⁴ This was not an easy policy line to maintain in the atmosphere of mounting evangelical fervour for child protection which swept even CD Act repeal circles in the early 1880s, and there is some evidence, not entirely clear, that even Mrs Butler began to fear a slide from principle among the association's London-based committee when she was not present to give them guidance.⁶⁵ By November 1883 the committee by majority decision warily conceded that the age of consent to sexual relations ought to be raised to sixteen for both males and females. It also noted that '[a]t the moment it may be the fact that the majority of girls need protection . . . to a higher age'. Given, however, that "Protection" implies subjection and dependence', to raise the age higher 'would do more harm than good'.⁶⁶

While this was an impeccable Millite libertarian line of reasoning it was not a notably satisfying programme of action and, in particular, it failed to satisfy a group of metropolitan women CD Acts repeal activists. These activists, like the LNA before them, also found the rationalist-male approach of the Social Purity Alliance worthy but ineffectual. Instead, in their anxiety to sponsor moral change from a position of political exclusion, they moved to claim a duty to act publicly based not on the grievance of citizenship denied but on an alternative basis of legitimation immediately accessible – that of motherhood. The result was the launching in May 1881 of the Moral Reform Union (MRU). While the MRU did not exclude men from membership, its declaration of intention 'To study and confer upon all subjects which especially affect the moral welfare of the young' in defence of 'the interests of pure family life' made it clear that this was an association designed to operate through female networks independent of male support. The further declaration that 'The purity of family life is our end and aim, but it can only be attained when we obey the holy command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"', confirmed the maternalist claim to public standing.⁶⁷

The inaugural meeting, an address by Dr Elizabeth Blackwell 'To Mothers on the Education of their Daughters', was held in the Bayswater drawing room of Mrs S. Woolcott Browne, a CD Acts repealer and LNA loyalist of the 1870s.⁶⁸ It was a sign of the times that Mrs Browne, hitherto a generous financial supporter of feminist libertarian causes founded by Mrs Butler, now felt it necessary to strike out on her own. Though we have no direct evidence, she may well have believed herself to be carrying out the wishes of Mrs Butler, as it was in April

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, June 1883, p. 53; also May 1883, p. 43.

⁶⁵ Butler to H. J. Wilson, 6 May [1883], Josephine Butler papers.

⁶⁶ *Vigilance Assoc. Journal*, Nov. 1883, p. 105.

⁶⁷ *Moral Reform Union*. [MRU] *Reports*, no. 1 (1882), pp. 1, 14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3. There is a brief obituary of Mrs Browne (1822–1908) in *Shield*, Jan. 1909, p. 58. For Mrs Browne's part in anti-CD and anti-vivisection work during the 1870s, see *MRU Reports*, no. 9 (1891), pp. 11, 15–16. Mrs Browne was also a major contributor to the funds of the VA during the 1870s.

1881 that the latter had sought by publicising the plight of ‘the innocent and betrayed’ to shame ‘mothers in the higher ranks of society’ into throwing off ‘that chilling reserve which seems too much like acquiescence in evil’.⁶⁹

The actual work accomplished by the MRU led inexorably towards co-operation with other evangelically tinged ‘maternalist’ organisations such as Ellice Hopkins’ Ladies’ Associations, yet (in tribute to the strength of MRU ties with the Unitarian and radical Nonconformist networks in general) it also led beyond attempts to remonstrate with public authorities to calls for ‘a share in the management’ of public institutions responsible for the welfare of women and children.⁷⁰ This latter viewpoint led it also in the direction of forthright criticism of social purity voluntary associations which failed to give a role to women in their work.⁷¹

As this set of descriptions makes plain, the social purity movement which crystallised into full associational form between 1881 and 1883 was a movement riven by potential fault-lines. Some of these were religion-based, some gender-based, and others were based on assumptions of conflict of class interest. All of these considerations affected recruiting goals, preferred methods of operation, the choice of priorities, and even on occasion the definition of social purity. Yet activists themselves were usually prepared to concede that there *was* a common set of assumptions behind their work: as one of them summed it up, ‘All the members of these societies accept the doctrine of the equal standard of morality for both sexes. All have faith in the possibility of chastity for men, as for women’.⁷² For much of the time they were even prepared to co-operate in sponsoring joint events and in distributing publicity for each other. Once the Gladstone government had convinced itself that the time was ripe for legislative action, however, this general spirit of co-operative effort was put to the test.

Moral reform triumphant: volunteer mobilisation and the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885

On 31 May 1883, Lord Rosebery introduced into the House of Lords the Criminal Law Amendment bill. This was, at last, the Gladstone government’s response to the recommendations of the Lords select committee on the protection of young girls which had reported in July 1882. The government accepted the committee’s finding that ‘juvenile prostitution . . . is increasing to an appalling

⁶⁹ Josephine Butler, *A Letter to the Mothers of England* (1881), pp. 19–21.

⁷⁰ E.g., *MRU. Reports*, no. 2 (1883), p. 7; no. 4 (1886), p. 6; no. 5 (1887), p. 5. Note in this context, the Union’s close connection with attempts to organise the entry of women into local government office: P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect. Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 317–23. As might be expected in such a highly committed circle of activists, union membership remained small, no more than 120 by 1883–4, of which 80 were women, and most of the rest wife–husband subscription teams.

⁷¹ *MRU. Reports*, no. 3 (1884), p. 4 (CVC); no. 4 (1886), p. 13 (CEPS). ⁷² *Ibid.*, no. 3, p. 3.

extent in England and especially in London' and claimed that it was accepting the committee's recommendations almost without exception.⁷³ The bill was a multi-purpose measure: one section legislated for the raising of the age of female consent to sexual intercourse from thirteen to sixteen years, other sections attempted to deter the activities of procurers of under-age girls, and an additional section tackled the problem of controlling street solicitation by empowering the police to take action without need to obtain proof of public annoyance. Because it was a composite measure, it exposed for the first time the tactical instability of large sections of the social purity support base.

The most offensive aspect of the bill to the radical libertarian wing of the social purity movement was its extension of police powers. CD Acts repeal activists who had spent the previous fourteen years battling police powers in 'declared towns' to detain women at their discretion were particularly suspicious that the government had chosen to introduce this blended measure only a month after placating its backbench by accepting a vote of the House of Commons to suspend enforcement of the CD Acts. Their reflex reaction was to accuse the government of opportunistic use of 'the great cry of the present moment . . . the increase of juvenile prostitution . . . for the purpose of scaring Parliament into sanctioning an extension of Police tyranny' in imitation of the 'medical scare' which had prepared the way for the CD Acts.⁷⁴ They had a point: Rosebery in introducing the bill hinted that the government saw it as a way of compensating for the useful deterrent effect which official circles believed the CD Acts had exerted on juvenile prostitution, and the Home Secretary, Harcourt, made it clear beyond doubt in the following year that he felt himself pledged 'to replace the protection which the suspension of the operation of the [CD] Acts had removed. The redemption of that pledge was these clauses with reference to brothels and streets, which may be called the police clauses, and in my opinion formed one of the most material parts of this Bill.'⁷⁵

For libertarians there was also the embarrassment of evaluating the attempts of voluntarists within the more paternalist/maternalist sections of the movement to tack onto the government's bill yet further police clauses, some of them under the apparently unobjectionable justification of equality of treatment before the law. The most persistent of these operators was the revered earl of Shaftesbury who, assisted by the petitions of factory girls and by the votes of the bench of bishops, actually achieved the criminalisation of street soliciting of women by men in the Lords debate on the 1884 version of the bill.⁷⁶

⁷³ *PD*, 3ser., cclxxix.1294. For the committee's findings and recommendations see *PP* 1882 (344), xiii.825–6.

⁷⁴ *Vigilance Assoc. Journal*, May 1883, p. 42. See also Josephine Butler in *Sentinel*, 1882, p. 75.

⁷⁵ *PD*, 3ser., cclxxix.1294; *Seeking and Saving*, 4 (1884), 59–60.

⁷⁶ *PD*, 3ser., cclxxxviii.410. For his associational support base see *Sentinel*, 1884, p. 270; *CVC. Report* (1884), p. 7. Shaftesbury failed, however, to persuade the incoming Conservative

The second major debate over principle which the government's bill precipitated among activists concerned the definition of female adulthood. The bill nominated sixteen as the age at which females could legally consent to sexual relations. This was the age recommended by the Lords select committee (though only after uneasy consideration of higher alternatives). Ellice Hopkins, by contrast, had labelled sixteen and seventeen as 'the dangerous years' in her evidence to the Lords select committee, and, according to one social purity activist who claimed to have 'often' moved resolutions in support of the Lords' recommendation, she had 'never yet succeeded in carrying it in an assembly of women. Some mother has invariably moved the amendment that the age should be eighteen or twenty-one, and this amendment has been invariably carried unanimously.'⁷⁷ The Vigilance Association, as we have seen, felt sixteen an appropriate compromise between protection and training for self-responsibility. (It based its calculation, at final resort, on the evidence of frequency of marriage at each age, a foundation of argument eventually adopted also by the Conservative Home Secretary (Cross) who finally carried a version of the bill into law in 1885.)

Such debates within the social purity movement did not go unnoticed by the politicians now charged with finding a way of responding to public anxieties. Beyond the two debates over principle there ultimately lurked a third point of concern – that of ensuring compliance with any law finally passed. The problem with all this voluntarist debate, as the political 'men of business' took pleasure in pointing out, was that it was irrelevant unless it could be shown to be aware of the realities of enforcement. 'The public opinion represented by eager petitioners is not the kind of public opinion which must execute the Act you are now asked to pass', explained Lord Salisbury to the archbishop of York in the Lords debate of 1883. 'You must pass an Act which the public opinion represented by twelve average jurymen put into a box is prepared to enforce. If your measure is so severe that such public opinion will not enforce it you will do more harm than good.'⁷⁸ In later versions of the bill both the provisions of the 'police clauses' and the setting of the age of consent became bargaining chips in the game of getting a bill passed at all.

Faced with these dilemmas and internal tensions, the social purity movement itself was driven to experiment with tighter forms of political co-ordination. As early as February 1883 a London inner circle of leaders had moved to anticipate the government introduction of a bill by appointing representatives to a Minors'

government to support his clause in 1885 and it was deliberately omitted from the final version of the Act as a concession to libertarian, anti-police sentiment: *PD*, 3 ser. ccc.1420–2.

⁷⁷ SC on Protection of Young Girls, *PP* 1882 (344), xiii.838; *Sentinel*, May 1883, p. 199 (Alicia Bewicke). The London Committee for Suppression of the Trade in English Girls also advocated 18–21 as its preference: *Sentinel*, July 1883, p. 219.

⁷⁸ *PD*, 3ser., cclxxx.774.

Protection Joint Committee. This committee was partly a tactics forum and parliamentary lobby group, partly a co-ordinating agency for the distribution and collection of petitions. The range of moral reform interest groups sending representatives to its meetings was at first an extended one and the claimed 1,041,690 signatures on petitions co-ordinated in support of the 1883 bill were regarded as a triumph by committee members.⁷⁹ As social purity leaders came to realise the obstacles thrown up by the parliamentary process, however, and the difficulty they faced in retaining government attention, anxieties within the committee began to accumulate. The government from early 1884 onwards was first pledged to, then actively preoccupied with, plans for the further extension of the male parliamentary franchise. It reintroduced a version of the Criminal Law Amendment bill in both 1884 and 1885 but made it clear that it was not pledged to fight for the original Lords committee recommendations.⁸⁰ In the background still hung the shadow of the suspended but unrepealed CD Acts.

In August 1884 the nerve of the majority on the Minors' Protection Joint Committee broke. In the wake of the government's abandonment of its bill for a second time it was decided that the police clauses which continued to arouse suspicion among libertarians should be sacrificed and that the committee should push for a private member's bill introduced into the Commons and restricted solely to raising the age of consent to sixteen.⁸¹ This restored unity of a sort to the movement but failed to convince key leaders that it would actually bring parliamentary success. Probably the least convinced among social purity leaders was Josephine Butler. She had already taken offence against the 'sly, dodgy way' in which committee business was conducted and regarded the barrister C. T. Mitchell, its chairman, as 'a born repressionist'.⁸² Now, as fear intensified that women's perspectives on public issues were at risk of even greater discount in a reformed parliament, she moved to play what cards she could before the new era dawned.⁸³

She was not the only leader of the movement looking for a way to break the legislative deadlock. The first attempt to create a wave of moral reform indignation was in fact engineered by the Nonconformist leaders of the London Committee for the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls in co-operation with their mass-member pledging network, the Gospel Purity Association. The issue they

⁷⁹ For an account of the origins of the Minors' Protection Joint Committee and a list of voluntary societies represented on it, see *Sentinel*, Jan 1884, p. 270. The petition figures come from *Seeking and Saving*, 4 (1884), p. 37.

⁸⁰ *PD*, 3ser., cclxxxvi.1453; ccxcvi.1439. See also Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, p. 128.

⁸¹ *Sentinel*, 1884, p. 336. For the acquiescence of Ellice Hopkins, a key player, in the Minors' Committee decision, see *Seeking and Saving*, 4 (1884), 182; 5 (1885), p. 10.

⁸² Butler to H. J. Wilson, 6 May [1883]; see also Butler to 'Dear Friend' [Miss Priestman], 4 Oct. [1884], Josephine Butler papers.

⁸³ Josephine Butler, Exeter Hall speech of 19 Feb. 1885, reported in *Sentinel*, 1885, p. 412; and see Roberts, 'Feminism and the State', p. 100.

chose to publicise was the ‘complicity of aristocratic elites in the ruin of ‘the daughters of the people’, and the detonator they used to fire the charge was the prosecution of Mrs Jeffries, a West End brothel-keeper with an aristocratic clientele.⁸⁴ When Mrs Jeffries pleaded guilty in court in May 1885 in order to avoid the hearing of evidence, and got off by paying a fine, the lecture circuits of the Gospel Purity Association across London and Lancashire briefly lit up with working-class rage and indignation.⁸⁵ The parliamentary response, however, was less impressive. (It did not help that one of the ‘men in high places’ alleged by enthusiasts to be covering up aristocratic vice was the Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt, sponsor of the Criminal Law Amendment bill when it was debated in the House of Commons in late May.)

Josephine Butler’s plan, being not merely an exposé of aristocratic vice, but one with a maternalist dimension professionally publicised, was more successful. As is well documented, Mrs Butler combined, during May and June 1885, with the Salvation Army leader, Catherine Booth, and the Yorkshire Congregationalist journalist, W. T. Stead, in a ‘secret commission’ to collect evidence of the existence of a trade in under-age girls in London. Some of that evidence the participants constructed from their own resources. Mrs Butler’s chief contribution was the encouragement of the reclaimed ex-procuress, Rebecca Jarrett, to volunteer her services in order to lead Stead to suppliers from whom he could ‘buy a virgin’. Mrs Booth then volunteered for the role of organising the girl’s safe conduct out of the country to demonstrate how that, too, could be achieved, while Stead used the events as the basis of a sensational series of revelations in his newspaper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*.⁸⁶ Mrs Butler, after reporting to her provincial allies the finding that ‘all that goes on in Brussels and Paris goes on also in London’ then explained what was expected to happen next. ‘We want to make all possible use of the wave of indignation which will be aroused . . . so I write to ask you all to be ready . . . I think the public will be greatly roused and we must take advantage of the awakened feeling.’⁸⁷

On 6 July 1885 Stead was ready to begin publication of his exposé of ‘the maiden tribute of modern Babylon’. He was only just in time. In June the Liberal government had fallen. Even before its fall, social purity leaders had noted its lack of commitment to goals the movement was united in believing to be core ones. (The 1885 version of the Criminal Law Amendment bill dropped the age of consent to fifteen.) There was, given Lord Salisbury’s record, no reason to believe that his incoming Conservative ministry would take up the measure with

⁸⁴ *London Committee. Reports*, no. 4 (1885), pp. 49–53. ⁸⁵ See note 53 above.

⁸⁶ For reliable standard accounts, see M. Pearson, *The Age of Consent. Victorian Prostitution and its Enemies* (1972), ch. 8; Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, pp. 108–10. Josephine Butler later recounted a highly defensive but not implausible version of her recruitment of Jarrett in her pamphlet *Rebecca Jarrett* [1885], pp. 40–2.

⁸⁷ Butler to Dear Friend [Miss Priestman], 5 June [1885], Josephine Butler papers.

any more seriousness.⁸⁸ As the incoming Home Secretary baldly explained to a turbulent House of Commons in early August, the ministry 'had taken this Bill in hand because of the publication of the articles in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and had been determined to pass it into law'.⁸⁹ Some backbench MPs expressed their disgust about being coerced into action by a campaign of class hatred promoted by 'ill-conditioned Democrats and Salvationist sentimentalists', but from the gallery Mrs Butler marvelled at '[h]ow wonderfully the protection of girls Bill passed [the Commons] last night on the top of this wave of popular anger!'⁹⁰

By 14 August the Criminal Law Amendment bill had been enacted as 48 & 49 Vic. c. 69. The age of female consent to sexual relations had been raised to sixteen years. The procurement of women and girls to become prostitutes (either within the country or abroad) had become a misdemeanour. JPs had been given the power to issue search warrants on information provided by parents, relatives or bona fide third parties that there was 'reasonable cause to suspect' that any woman or girl was 'unlawfully detained for immoral purposes'. And brothel-keepers and owners had become liable to prosecution by summary procedures simpler and less demanding than the prosecutions on indictment previously required.

Stead, the hero of the hour, left London for a triumphant tour of the towns of the industrial north to begin the work of setting up a national network of vigilance associations to ensure the enforcement of the new Act. Behind him he left two smouldering debates among moral reform supporters about how best to evaluate what had been achieved. The first was a debate about the methods which he had used to stampede 'public opinion' into awareness. As noted above, part of Stead's evidence of the existence of a trade in under-age girls was self-created: he had 'proved' his case by direct participation in a series of events designed to show how such a trade could operate. Publication of the story which resulted upset two groups of hitherto loyal activists. It upset paternalist/maternalist conservatives who regarded the indiscriminate market-assisted publication of salacious detail as itself a source of demoralisation.⁹¹ It also upset feminist progressives who could not reconcile Stead's liberty-infringing means – his treatment of his thirteen-year-old 'bought virgin' in particular – with his supposedly liberty-promoting ends. It was the second of these reactions which

⁸⁸ Salisbury had been a member of the 1881 Lords select committee. For his earlier scepticism about legislating on the issue, see *PD*, 3ser., cclxxx.774.

⁸⁹ *PD*, 3ser., ccc.1416. This is a hardening of Cross's commitment on second-reading sponsorship of the bill on 9 July: ccxcix.197.

⁹⁰ Butler to 'Dear Friends', 10 July [1885], Josephine Butler papers. Cf. Mr Warton MP in *PD*, 3ser., ccc.587–8, and see Charles Hopwood MP to similar effect at col. 581.

⁹¹ *Sentinel*, Dec. 1885, p. 549; *Christian*, Dec. 1885, p. 962. See also the evangelical warnings sounded in *Seeking and Saving*, Oct. 1885, p. 32, and in *Rescue Society Reports*, no. 33 (1886), pp. 21–2, that it was possible in the heat of the moment to be over-forgiving of prostitutes.

caused the most damage by bringing about a permanent split in the committee of the Vigilance Association.⁹² Yet these fierce debates over means justifying ends, while they preoccupied a limited circle, were relatively easily contained once Stead himself, in November 1885, achieved unexpected martyrdom as a target of prosecution for child abduction. Duty to the greater object demanded that he be forgiven his regrettable but understandable impetuosity.⁹³

A second debate triggered by the passing of the Act was a less focused one, but one ultimately more capable of inflicting long-term damage on the social purity movement than clashes over the evaluation of flawed acts by individuals. This was the old debate, never resolved, about the implications of 'legislating virtue' itself. Given the suspicion of coercive use of state power held by many old CD Acts opponents, it was remarkable that the Criminal Law Amendment Act was promoted as unanimously as it was in 1885.⁹⁴ Behind the scenes, however, there was indeed tension between populist interventionists such as Stead and ideology-torn 'natural rights libertarians' such as Mrs Butler. Given the apparent urgency of the need to seize the moment, Mrs Butler in 1885 had consoled herself with the hope that the state and its agents could be kept honest by reinvigorated active citizens – citizens empowered rather than marginalised by the new law.⁹⁵ Yet almost as soon as the Act had been passed, her doubts resurfaced. The fear that the extension of state action was a betrayal of the cause of 'moral and spiritual forces', an invasion of domestic space, and an open door to the policing of external behaviour, effectively crippled her inclination to participate further in Stead's plans.⁹⁶

⁹² Rebecca Jarrett's 'bought virgin', Eliza Armstrong, was subjected to a series of emotionally disturbing experiences, including a medical examination to verify her virginity. Forced medical examination had been at the heart of the feminist case against the CD Acts. For the Vigilance Association split on the issue, see Roberts, 'Feminism and the State', pp. 101–3.

⁹³ *Sentinel*, 1885, pp. 517, 550; *Christian*, 1885, p. 932; William Shaen in *Vigilance Association Journal* 1886, p. 24; Hopkins, *Present Moral Crisis*, pp. 5–6. Note: Stead was tried and convicted, not for a breach of the new Criminal Law Amendment Act (as Pearson, *Age of Consent*, p. 192, claims) but, slightly less sensationally, under s. 55 of the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861 (24 & 25 Vic., c. 100). (The section had been used before against 'philanthropic kidnapping' by volunteer agencies.)

⁹⁴ In the event, there was only one progressive libertarian MP prepared in 1885 to stand against any state attempt to 'legislate morals' on the once mainstream repealer argument that law enforcement undermined the incentive to citizen self-management. This was Charles Hopwood, recorder of Liverpool: 'He warned them that they would be destroying the moral responsibility of the population in proportion to every year they raised the age of these protected girls' (*PD*, 3ser., ccc.772, and see ccxcix.200–1).

⁹⁵ *Sentinel*, 1885, p. 411. See also Roberts, 'Feminism and the State', pp. 100–1.

⁹⁶ 'I have my fears lest the appeal should be too much to the Police, or even to Law, and too little to moral and spiritual forces': Josephine Butler to William Shaen, 23 Aug. [1885] (typescript copy), Symington Collection (WYL218), box 19. See also Butler to 'Dear Friends', 17 Aug. [1885], Josephine Butler papers, and full discussion in Roberts, 'Feminism and the State', pp. 101–5. While Butler accepted nomination to the NVA executive committee on its formation, she was never an active member, and withdrew altogether from membership sometime in 1894–5.

In the victory-charged atmosphere prevailing, her signals of doubt and anxiety barely registered. On 21 August 1885 came the official launching in London of Stead's organisation for the continued operation of social purity activism – the National Vigilance Association 'for the enforcement and improvement of the laws for the repression of criminal vice and public immorality' (NVA).⁹⁷ This body, led by a carefully selected blend of existing social purity elites, was intended to act on a permanent basis across the country to harness the enthusiasms of all segments of the 1885 crusade. Its provisional committee stood as guarantee of its inclusiveness. Presided over by G. W. E. Russell MP, a founder of the CEPS, it included a range of Churchmen (Webb-Peploe, J. Stuart, two bishops), a powerful contingent of Nonconformists (the Buntings, H. P. Hughes from Wesleyan Methodism; Waugh, Stead, Mearns from Congregationalism; Dr Clifford from the Baptists; Bramwell Booth from the Salvation Army), as well as Cardinal Manning. It also deliberately threw aside the gender segregation practices of the previous wave of purity associations (the Central Vigilance Committee most explicitly) to accept a blend of men and women. (Josephine Butler, Ellice Hopkins, and the recently widowed Mrs Fawcett all accepted nomination; the Ladies' National Association, the Ladies' Association for the Care of Friendless Girls, the Moral Reform Union and the Gospel Purity Association networks all achieved representation.) More tentatively, it also attempted to maintain the participation of working men in the movement. To this end Stead deliberately subsidised the claims of the printing worker and trade union official, W. A. Coote, to the position of co-secretary (a position beyond his reach unless it carried a salary).⁹⁸ The permanent committee which emerged in early 1886 confirmed the consolidation of public standing of a new generation of (predominantly Nonconformist) evangelicals. The chief public articulator of NVA views and the chairman of its executive committee was the journal editor and leading Methodist layman, Percy Bunting. Behind him, Stead's evangelical protégé W. A. Coote quickly established himself as the NVA's administrative anchor at the expense of the less religiously reliable but more gentlemanly barrister co-secretary, Ralph Thicknesse.⁹⁹ Funding for the new association appears to have been heavily subsidised by the northern Nonconformist businessmen Frank Crossley and J. P. Thomasson.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ W. A. Coote, *A Romance of Philanthropy* (1916), p. 5; *Sentinel*, 1885, pp. 475–6.

⁹⁸ Coote, *A Romance of Philanthropy*, pp. 18–19, noting that this was Stead's reward, in part, for Coote's services in deflecting 'socialist' trouble-makers at the foundation conference.

⁹⁹ Coote, *A Romance of Philanthropy*, pp. 19–20, 23; L. Bland, *Banishing the Beast. English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885–1914* (1995), pp. 8–9, 32, 34, 38. Note, though, the solidly metropolitan professional middle-class character of the NVA leadership overall: of its first permanent executive committee in 1886 approximately a third of the total of fifty-nine members were clergy, lawyers or journalists/publishers, and many more were wives of these members and/or active female 'semi-professionals'/managers of charitable institutions. (The male/female ratio was 33:26.)

¹⁰⁰ Coote, *A Romance of Philanthropy*, pp. 4–5. The foundation treasurer was the Congregational businessman, Samuel Morley MP, succeeded on his death in 1886 by the ubiquitous Francis

As was to be expected of an organisation which had emerged out of a campaign of mass mobilisation led by journalists, clergy and CD Acts repeal campaigners, the NVA moved quickly to maintain momentum. Its very moment of foundation had been stage-managed by Stead to be a newsworthy event: on 22 August, the day following the foundation conference, processions of supporters in a symbolic act of repossession of the modern Babylon had converged on Charing Cross from ten directions, thereafter to march to Hyde Park for a combined act of public witness. Estimates of the numbers taking part in this mobilisation of 'nearly every religious and social element in the metropolis' ranged from 100,000 to 250,000. The whirlwind tour of the north of England by Stead, Waugh and Hugh Price Hughes which followed drew another 30,000 attendants to meetings in eleven cities over twelve days in a 'purity crusade' proudly described by its promoters as more like a series of 'revival services' than 'political demonstrations'.¹⁰¹ By its first anniversary the NVA was able to claim twenty-three branches in London and another fifty societies in association across the country.¹⁰²

To the chief participants the events of the final half of 1885 were difficult to interpret as anything less than climactic. '[A] hundred years may never bring us again such a tide of popular feeling for getting the law worked as we have now', exulted Ellice Hopkins.¹⁰³ To some, it was a near millennial moment of national self-abasement and recovenancing. England had been 'humiliated to the dust by confession of desperately vicious crime which [had] been forced from her', wrote Dyer's press ally, *The Christian*, but there was 'no other country in Europe' more capable of rallying to action to atone for sin.¹⁰⁴ In such an atmosphere it was appropriate that Stead should choose to present himself in semi-humility as merely the current mouthpiece for a venerable national tradition. At Darlington in late 1885, during his 'crusade in the north', he wove his audience into the unfolding plot as follows:

You who have been foremost in every good work for the last half century; you who have battled for freedom when slavery was regarded as inevitable as prostitution is now; you who in this hall and in other halls never failed to raise a loud and imperative voice in favour of all that tends to humanity and virtue – I appeal to you to-night for a cause as sacred as any of those that ever appealed to you in Darlington.¹⁰⁵

Peek. NVA subscription and donation income in its first seven months was £1,293: *National Vigilance Association*. [NVA] *Reports*, no. 1 (1887), p. 26. Thereafter annual income of the central organisation settled at c. £2,000 p.a.: Coote, *A Romance of Philanthropy*, 29.

¹⁰¹ For the London events, see *Christian*, 27 Aug. 1885, p. 645; Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, p. 113. The provincial 'crusade' is reported in *Christian*, 22 Oct. 1885, pp. 832–3; *Sentinel*, 1885, pp. 509ff.

¹⁰² *NVA Reports*, no. 1, p. 8. ¹⁰³ Hopkins, *Present Moral Crisis*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ *Christian*, 27 Aug. 1885, p. 645. See also Butler quoted in Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, p. 114; Hopkins, *Present Moral Crisis*, pp. 1–2.

¹⁰⁵ *Christian*, 15 Oct. 1885.

The cause was now that of the ‘ruined girl’, someone’s daughter, but the capacity to empathise with the victims of suffering and injustice, the citizen ability to reach independent judgement and the will to act collectively to bring about change, Stead implied, were the recognisable signs of the existence of a distinctive way of thinking and acting in the world – an English moral reform tradition. That tradition appeared to have vindicated itself yet again – heroically so.

A tradition in retreat? Moral reform after 1885

From the point of view of voluntarist elites active in the mid-1880s, what actually happened next was a series of experiences much more difficult to classify than the simple victory/defeat alternatives of 1885. There were, it is true, moments of pure political triumph still to come. In 1886, for example, a precariously placed Gladstone government attempted to consolidate a key section of its remaining support base by sponsoring the formal repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts before splitting over Irish Home Rule and losing office.¹⁰⁶ Between then and 1914, however, great and clear-cut confrontations were difficult to organise, and even more difficult to steer to victory. That is not necessarily to label ‘moral reform’ a tradition in retreat. As the brief case studies which follow will indicate, it may be that, in certain areas of activity, moral reform organisations were able to mobilise active citizen participation as effectively as ever they had done over the previous century. (The democratic restructuring of local government between 1888 and the turn of the new century eventually assisted such participation, especially in London.) Nonetheless, the realities of public life after 1885 came as a shock to those who had prophesied a moral millennium, and a sobering experience even to those who saw their role as one supportive of existing authority.

For social purity activists, a cutting down to political size was to be experienced within only months of political triumph. The successive general elections which launched the new age of male democracy in December 1885 and June 1886 were a setback to those who had hoped to entrench moral reform issues generally on the new political agenda. The social purity candidate Alfred Dyer made no impact on the ex-Home Secretary Sir William Harcourt in the November 1885 general election campaign at Derby. At Fulham the chairman of the NVA provisional committee, G. W. E. Russell, failed twice in succession to win the support of the new urban voters. By the time of its first annual report the NVA executive was noting how difficult it was to make a distinctive impression on an electorate polarised by ‘the great increase of party feeling’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ McHugh, *Prostitution*, pp. 227–8.

¹⁰⁷ *NVA Reports*, no. 1, p. 25. For Dyer’s campaign at Derby see *Sentinel*, 1885, pp. 541, 548. G. W. E. Russell finally won his urban credentials through election to the first LCC in 1889

On other fronts the young NVA was able to do rather better. Its encouragement of active citizen participation in community-based moral supervision had notable early success in achieving police action against brothels, street prostitutes and public indecency. This achievement it was able to consolidate in a significant range of urban areas by sponsoring candidates to borough councils and their watch committees.¹⁰⁸ How effective such action was in the medium to longer term it is difficult to know without further detailed local research. Against the general assertions of those who, like NVA secretary William Coote, announced in 1908 that London had become 'an open-air cathedral', must be balanced evidence of vice merely disrupted, displaced or even defended by community backlash. (As on previous occasions, prostitutes dislodged from known locations had a way of finding new premises under new protectors, police and magistrates had a tendency to distance themselves from voluntarist moral absolutism when it appeared to generate more disorder than it repressed, and volunteers themselves might overstrain community tolerance by their indiscriminate or misdirected interventions.¹⁰⁹)

More telling, perhaps, than these attempts to measure impact on deviants, is evidence of the usual generation-based decline in energy and enthusiasm among activists. In the case of the NVA this was a development actively assisted by the national secretary who found it prudent to centralise prosecution management in order to keep control over legal costs incurred by provincial zealots. An equally large part of the explanation for decline can probably be traced to the fact that social purity depended on existing denominational religious structures for its organisation in many areas and this made it vulnerable to changes in the focus of attention of the 'host body'.¹¹⁰ That said, there was clearly much life left in a movement which as late as 1912 was able to bring enough popular pressure to bear on the preoccupied Asquith Liberal government to persuade it to move against white slavers in yet a further Criminal Law Amendment Act. The main question mark which remained above the victory of 1912 was the extent to which social purity retained an independent identity as a cause – the

but had to retreat to Bedfordshire North (the territorial heartland of his relation, the duke of Bedford) to find a constituency willing to return him to parliament (1892).

¹⁰⁸ *Sentinel*, 1886, pp. 150–1; Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, pp. 209–11; Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 111–15.

¹⁰⁹ On the most notorious of these interventions, Mrs Ormiston Chant's campaign against the 'Empire' music hall in 1894, see Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, pp. 209–14; Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 95–7, 105–8. As a general rule, researchers have become more wary of conceding the NVA and its allies blanket influence the closer they have come to investigate a particular region. See especially Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 122–6, 149–53; Bartley, *Prostitution*, pp. 157–69, 193–4; and, generally, Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, pp. 130–6. But cf. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, pp. 160–71, and Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 101–5, 108–10.

¹¹⁰ On branch vitality see, e.g., Bartley, *Prostitution*, p. 176. For NVA central policy control over branches, see Coote, *Romance of Philanthropy*, pp. 120–4, esp. 121. For evidence of dependence on denominational 'fashion', see Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, p. 202.

extent to which it might, in effect, have been ‘captured’ by organisations exerting the more ‘primary’ appeal of loyalty to denomination, sex or political party.¹¹¹

A similar – in fact more severe – form of capture and organisational asset-stripping was experienced by the political wing of the post-1885 temperance movement. As noted in the first section of this chapter, the UKA in particular had tied its fortunes to the Gladstonian Liberal Party by the mid-1880s. This, naturally, left it in a short-term position of considerable vulnerability. Not only did its leader, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, lose his parliamentary seat for a brief period in 1885–6 but the party split over Irish Home Rule which accompanied its fall from power strained relations between UKA leaders as well. In the medium term the UKA seemed to recover its position rather efficiently by continuing its efforts to make itself indispensable electorally to the weakened and radicalised Liberal Party. Its reward was inclusion of ‘the veto’ (local ratepayers gaining the right to withdraw, without compensation, permission for licensed premises to operate in their area) as a ‘first-rank’ policy commitment in the party’s Newcastle programme of 1891. The failure, however, of the minority Liberal government of 1892–5 to press its veto bill beyond a first reading, in the face of the successful mobilisation of mass opinion by the drink trade, once again drove prohibitionists onto the back foot. Faced with a situation in which they were regarded as an increasing electoral liability by party tacticians, they also found themselves unable to steel themselves to use their ultimate weapon – electoral abstention. By the 1890s, in short, the UKA was so locked in to the Liberal Party at both national and constituency levels that its power to use its supporters as a private army had clearly diminished.¹¹² Yet, rather than expressing gratitude for sacrifice, Liberal leaders were increasingly likely to worry that temperance enthusiasts might lose more voters than they delivered. This anxiety turned to open desire to distance the party from all temperance issues after the disastrous electoral defeat of 1895.¹¹³

The regulation of the liquor trade continued to be a major generator of political emotions in the years immediately following, but politicians were no longer as eager as they had been to take advantage. An era of royal commissions and expert recommendations ensued.¹¹⁴ As with social purity, this is not to say that temperance suddenly dissolved as a movement. As with social purity, much of the significant work was achieved at community level. By the 1880s the temperance generation which had rallied to the UKA on its founding had become a civic force in its own right, especially in the towns of the

¹¹¹ Note Bland’s claim that the core motive was a wish to placate the Women’s Liberal Federation for its failure to move on women’s suffrage: *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 297–302.

¹¹² Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, pp. 240, 274, 324–5.

¹¹³ Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition*, pp. 169–72.

¹¹⁴ For a brief review of the slide in acceptance of moral discourse about drunkenness among policy elites after 1890, see Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 188–90.

north where temperance-dominated town councils became almost the standard model of civic respectability. It was, however, increasingly the case from the 1890s onwards that national temperance networks found themselves unable to replace generation-based membership and income loss. Those with specifically denominational origins found themselves faced (as similar social purity groups also found) with the added risk of diluted identity as denominational priorities changed. Under these conditions mainstream organisations came under strong pressure to switch energies from the recruitment of new supporters to the retention of existing members of the temperance community. This they were able to do with some success until well into the twentieth century.¹¹⁵ The ability of the temperance movement to project itself as a public assertion of Non-conformist moral credentials for acceptance to equal citizenship, however, had clearly reached its peak and had started to subside by 1900.¹¹⁶

If the more openly symbolic campaigns for moral reform found themselves challenged to retain public relevance by the turn of the new century, what of the fortunes of moral reform movements aiming to act in co-operation with existing state policies and institutions? Once again, the story was one of struggle to meet the challenge of shifting political and cultural assumptions. In this context, voluntary associations pledged to humanise the application of the poor laws and the criminal punishment system experienced a particularly confusing period as the state seemed for a time to welcome, then to devalue or discard, the contribution they aimed to make.

The Charity Organisation Society was to receive a hint of the new world in waiting as early as 1886. We have already seen it struggling in that year to retain control over private giving, but that was only half its problem. Relying as it did on the semi-formalised contract of the co-operative division of responsibility between the poor law and private charity set out in the Goschen memorandum of 1869, the COS could only look with distaste on the attempts of Goschen's successor at the local government board, Joseph Chamberlain, to modify the rules of the game. While Goschen and the COS of 1869 had been in agreement about the duty of both poor law and charity to discipline the labourer to prudent self-sufficiency, the Chamberlain circular of 1886 encouraging local government priming of the labour market by work provision in times of slump seemed to COS leaders an ominous slide from basic principle.¹¹⁷ And as state-assisted unemployment, sickness and retirement-funding schemes slid onto the agenda of high politics during the 1890s, thereafter to be enacted by Liberal governments of the Edwardian era, the COS found itself repeatedly reacting to

¹¹⁵ On northern civic culture and temperance, see Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, pp. 193–9, also pp. 174, 241–3.

¹¹⁶ Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition*, pp. 176, 221.

¹¹⁷ Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 298–300; Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, p. 61; Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, p. 192.

rather than co-operating with state authority. C. S. Loch's grandson is thought by some writers since to have rather overstated the situation in his conclusion that 'the C.O.S., for the remainder of Loch's secretaryship [after 1885 – he retired in 1914], was fighting a rearguard action against "socialism" and state intervention in the relief of poverty', and there is indeed evidence that some COS leaders by the time of the poor law royal commission of 1905–9 were less doctrinaire free labour marketeers than they had been in the 'hard and dry' 1870s. The general impression of contemporaries both inside and outside the society by the 1890s, however, was that the COS was more concerned to put a brake on change than to assist it.¹¹⁸

The great consolation prize which the COS was able to claim for its efforts over the period was, of course, the successful continuation of its pioneering role as a developer of professional standards of training for charity workers. Given that the vision of the founders had included not only the vision of pauperism deterred but also the vision of volunteer citizenship restored, this was no minor claim. Loch, it was clear, pursued this vision of a post-sectarian yet self-sacrificial 'church of charity' throughout his public career.¹¹⁹ Even on this front, however, there were setbacks. Volunteers for training were never as plentiful or as committed as effective operation required. More distracting still, as became evident after the onset of a new post-1900 period of democratic cultural progressivism, the COS was worryingly easy to dismiss as the project of a class-stratified society, now outmoded. (This was the charge levelled, explicitly or implicitly, by the more socially egalitarian Guilds of Help which emerged to duplicate a significant range of COS community-building objectives from 1903 onwards.¹²⁰) The COS survived this challenge, but at the expense of relying even more heavily on its reputation as a trainer of professional 'social workers' rather than on its ability to mobilise supporters to active citizenship.

A similar and even more pronounced pattern of development can be traced through the fortunes of voluntary organisations set up to deal with criminal law reform and prison discipline. The Howard Association, launched in 1866 on assumptions similar to those underpinning the COS, found itself, like the COS at the end of its foundation era, struggling to maintain first principles, chief among them the principle that adult citizens were to be held responsible for the consequences of their own willed actions. Even more than C. S. Loch,

¹¹⁸ Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society*, p. 117. The case for and against the COS record of successful adaptation is summarised in Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, pp. 171–4, 192–6, and in Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, pp. 61–2, 66.

¹¹⁹ E.g., Mowat, *COS*, pp. 80–1. See also Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, p. 61.

¹²⁰ Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, pp. 170–4; Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, ch. 3, noting especially that Guild membership of 8,000 'surpassed that of the COS' by 1911 (p. 70). Cf., however, Behlmer, 'Character Building', pp. 67–70, for doubts about Guild impact as well.

the Howard Association's long-serving secretary (1866–1901), William Tal-lack, found slipping state commitment to the ideal of the autonomous moral individual a cause for regret.¹²¹

Unlike the COS, however, the Howard Association, while doing its best to reconcile itself to non-retributive punishments, had allowed the specialist role of casework support to slip sideways into other, more denomination-linked hands. (The Church of England Temperance Society became, from 1876 onwards, the chief social work presence in magistrates' courts and, by 1900, had developed through 'prison gate missions' a prototype of the probation officer – a category finally given formal legal recognition in 1907.) As the prison system settled into a nationally unified network during the 1880s and thereafter started to diversify its treatment of inmates in an attempt to register a growing perception of offenders as environmentally or biologically generated defectives rather than as moral transgressors, the role of the evangelically conditioned association for the rehabilitation of sinful penitents became more difficult to explain and the support base of the Howard Association shrank accordingly.¹²² In 1891 Henry Salt's foundation of a Humanitarian League for the prevention of cruelty to prisoners, children and animals alike demonstrated that there might be a more 'modern' basis on which to recruit to campaigns for the alleviation of unnecessary suffering. On another flank, the outbreak of Edwardian suffragette civil disobedience campaigns revived the libertarian demand for the residual rights of individuals caught between law and conscience to be respected. This led to the foundation of the Penal Reform League in 1907, whose supporters, together with the legacy-assisted supporters of a vestigial Howard Association, formed the eventual basis of the Howard League in 1921.¹²³ In this way 'active citizen' voluntary associations continued to make a recurrent, if fitful, impact on the agendas of criminal law administration. The impact was not negligible but it was clearly of diminishing significance when compared with the contribution made by public officials and their professionally qualified advisers.¹²⁴

The one major exception to this chronicle of increasing alienation and decreasing influence for moral reform 'auxiliary' organisations is the case of

¹²¹ Rose, *Struggle for Penal Reform*, pp. 60, 66. Cf. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 253–4.

¹²² On the emergence of the probation officer, see Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink*, pp. 104–5; Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, pp. 305–6, 374. For trends in penal policy, see *ibid.*, ch. 6. For Howard Association subscription income trends, see Rose, *Struggle for Penal Reform*, pp. 48, 304.

¹²³ D. Weinbren, 'Against All Cruelty: The Humanitarian League, 1891–1919', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 38 (1994), pp. 86–105; Rose, *Struggle for Penal Reform*, ch. 6. Note also the reactivation of libertarian voluntarism during World War I via the National Council for Civil Liberties, established in 1916.

¹²⁴ See Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 300–1.

the London (or, as it was known from 1889, the National) Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. As we noted, at the time of its foundation in 1884 the NSPCC gained significant impetus from imputed links with the social purity movement, but its development thereafter diverged markedly from social purity patterns of operation with notable stabilising effect both on its financial resources and on its relations with public authorities. By the turn of the new century its annual income was usually more than £50,000, it was claiming a subscriber base of 46,000, and its national office-bearers were being treated as 'expert witnesses' by a respectful series of parliamentary and Home Office officials who usually acted on the advice tendered.¹²⁵ A certain amount of this respect was based on the ability of the NSPCC to mobilise 'public opinion', but a great deal more of it was based on awareness of the professionalism of the society's operations and on the consequent superiority of its 'social statistical data-base'. In other words, the NSPCC had managed, more successfully than any other moral reform voluntary organisation of its time, to harness the roles of enthusiast and expert in the one (normally) harmonious organisation. It did this by relying, from foundation, entirely on the services of a centrally controlled 'private army' of waged local agents (males, formally trained by the Society from 1890 onwards) whom it was able to pay because of the efforts of its other wing of support – its volunteer (and chiefly middle-class female) district subscription collectors.¹²⁶ While this strict division of roles clearly 'devalued' the citizen-training and class-conciliation aspects of voluntarism so prized by the COS, it equally clearly simplified and strengthened the relationship of the society with public authorities.¹²⁷ It was, nonetheless, a distinct advantage for the NSPCC that, in dealing with the 'best interests' of potential, rather than actual, adult citizens, it was generally able to avoid the tensions about the moral responsibility of the individual which so irritated relations between state policy-making elites and voluntary society leaders in adjacent areas of social policy debate.¹²⁸

Finally, what of the capacity of moral reformers to develop new agendas of moral concern? From a 'traditional' perspective, the later Victorian and Edwardian decades might seem to have offered a ready opportunity. As will be recalled, times of working-class prosperity had regularly also been times

¹²⁵ Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, pp. 238, 143, 219–22.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1, 144. NSPCC agents numbered 1 in 1884, 163 by 1900 (p. 162). As Behlmer points out (pp. 167–8), NSPCC introduction of professional training for all its agents predates better-known COS efforts by six years.

¹²⁷ Further foundations of NSPCC success, not dealt with here, included the carefully non-prosecutory, family-preserving policy which Waugh pursued in order to confirm the benevolent intentions of the society in working-class communities: Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, pp. 171–5.

¹²⁸ See, however, Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, on the school meals debate of 1906 (pp. 214–16) where the NSPCC joined with the COS (though on rather divergent grounds: Lewis, *Voluntary Sector*, pp. 64–5) to criticise the 'demoralising' effects of state intervention.

of moral anxiety about working-class consumption choices, and there was no doubting that the purchasing power of working people in employment rose substantially over the final quarter of the nineteenth century. The investment of business interests in late Victorian 'leisure industries' certainly placed market temptations before urban working people over the period, as they had to a lesser degree in the 1780s, 1820s and 1850s.¹²⁹ Yet, in the judgement of that most experienced of nineteenth-century social historians, F. M. L. Thompson, '[t]he interesting point' about reactions to developments 'from the 1870s onwards' is that 'the more leisure the working classes had, the less censorious and alarmist were the propertied classes about the ways in which the workers used it'.¹³⁰

This judgement certainly rings true when compared with the evidence of most volunteer campaigns for the disciplining of working class leisure. Sunday observance activists, for example, now struggled to recruit and maintain their support base.¹³¹ Anxieties among educated and official opinion about the capacity of the urban working classes to survive a period of rising wage levels without spending the surplus on drink also appear to have peaked in the 1870s before beginning a slow decline.¹³² Anxieties about the corrupting power of the press and of popular commercial entertainments in general were perhaps less readily moderated. (The recurrent crusades of the NVA against music hall indecency have been noted above.) Yet even here the focus of concern was shifting beyond paternalist anxiety about specifically working-class indiscipline. Instead we find a post-Darwinian set of anxieties about the ability of human beings in general to control 'instinctive drives', with the outwardly 'self-controlled' as vulnerable as anyone else. In addition, as has been pointed out, middle-class entrepreneurs had, by the final decades of the century, made large investments in the business of providing entertainments to newly affluent mass audiences. This gave them a stake both in resisting 'puritan' pressure groups and in avoiding unnecessary provocations of public authority.¹³³

On two fronts only did this newfound sense of cultural toleration fail to hold and new moral reform campaigns emerge to keep idleness and market

¹²⁹ For working-class purchasing power, see Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation*, pp. 79–84. For general surveys of the growth of the mass-market leisure industry, see Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, pp. 288–306; W. H. Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850–1914* (1981), ch. 14.

¹³⁰ Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 276. ¹³¹ Wigley, *Victorian Sunday*, ch. 10.

¹³² See Dingle, *Campaign for Prohibition*, p. 615 for 1870s examples; Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 215–16 for statistics on metropolitan arrests for drunkenness, 1870–1914 (which he interprets as a barometer of pressure to enforce rather than a measure of incidence). Petrow judges that significant behavioural change did not take place until the introduction of effective opening hours restrictions during World War I (p. 186).

¹³³ On control of 'instinctive drives', see Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, ch. 4, and his analysis of R. L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1885), pp. 150–3. It is worth noting, as well, the NSPCC refusal to adopt a 'class-specific' approach to the explanation of child cruelty: Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, pp. 94–6. On commercial attitudes towards the protection of their investment in 'leisure industries', see Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, pp. 287–9.

temptation in check. The first of these campaigns was a crusade directed against gambling. The trigger to action was the remarkable expansion of commercially organised facilities for working-class gambling – facilities which, assisted by the spread of the halfpenny press, were by 1914 being used by possibly 80 per cent of the adult population.¹³⁴ The actual outlays involved were minor in comparison with working-class spending on drink but the symbolic offence was considerable. This challenge to Protestant evangelical reverence for honest reward, honestly earned, led to the foundation in 1890 of the first voluntary association since the Vice Society specifically pledged to repress gambling. The National Anti-Gambling League was a Nonconformist-led pressure group organised on lines adapted from the UKA.¹³⁵ Like the UKA it embodied a strong streak of Nonconformist symbolic challenge to the moral credentials of outdated ‘aristocratic’ elites. Unlike the UKA it managed to carry part of its programme into law in 1906 when the incoming Liberal government carried a bill criminalising all activity associated with street betting. The government’s motives for making this move appear to have had little to do with a wish to propitiate the association, however: a mood of anxiety about the ‘national efficiency’ of English society in the face of international rivalry had triggered yet another ‘progressive’ phase of legislating to inculcate in citizens a sense of civic duty.¹³⁶

A concern to make better citizens also loomed large in justifications of the second major volunteer experiment in urban working-class character-building over the 1885–1914 period – the youth training movement. Yet again, a movement with cultural (and sometimes organisational) links to older moral reform movements was taken up and developed in new directions by leaders with new priorities. The first ‘boys’ brigades’, begun in Glasgow in 1883 before expansion to England in 1886 and adoption by a variety of religious denominations during the 1890s, were the cross-breed offspring of two existing volunteer associational movements (the Sunday school movement and the volunteer military training movement) assisted by a third (temperance). The second-phase and even more successful movement of the Edwardian era (Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout movement) also had its links with older networks (notably the YMCA).¹³⁷

¹³⁴ R. McKibbin, ‘Working-Class Gambling in Britain 1880–1939’, in *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford, 1990), ch. 4 at p. 109; see also Petrow, *Policing Morals*, p. 239.

¹³⁵ M. Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter. Popular Gambling and English Society, c. 1823–1961* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 29–30; Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 240, 245–6. Note, *inter alia*, the Nonconformist appropriation of the rhetoric of ‘national moral judgments’ and of the lineage of the Wilberforcean moral reform tradition: D. Dixon, ‘“Class Law”: The Street Betting Act of 1906’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 8 (1980), pp. 101–28 at p. 104.

¹³⁶ Dixon, ‘The Street Betting Act’, pp. 108, 117–19; Petrow, *Policing Morals*, p. 293. It is worth noting that support for the 1906 bill extended to include the newly formed Labour Party.

¹³⁷ J. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society. British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London, 1977), chs. 1–3.

Though the movements were presented as experiments in class cultural reconciliation, it is clear from the evidence of membership that leadership in the pre-1914 period was a middle-class preserve, rank-and-file membership a role for lower-middle-class and respectable working-class teenage boys.¹³⁸

What is also clear is that a movement begun as an attempt by denominational religious organisers to stabilise the process of recruitment to adult membership of their denominations became most successful the more it distanced itself from an explicit religious purpose. The goal of scouting was certainly to discipline otherwise unruly and possibly delinquent adolescents in preparation for a life of adult moral responsibility in a way which would have been recognisable to the founders of the Sunday school movement of the 1780s. What had changed were the underlying assumptions about what discipline and moral responsibility might mean. If eighteenth-century reformers had been eager to lead children and adolescents out of a godless state of uncalculating hedonism, early twentieth-century reformers aimed to achieve their goals by offering an escape from an over-regulated urban existence into a fantasy land of semi-hedonistic ‘self-reliance’ which, not fortuitously, was also a training in the physical and social skills thought necessary by secular elites to ensure citizen readiness to defend the new Jerusalem – the nation state.¹³⁹

A public sphere transformed: late nineteenth-century contexts of adaptation and decline

As we have seen, chapter by chapter in the course of this study, moral reform movements were always the result of ‘creative tension’ between associations of the committed and the wider society. The committed set agendas, mobilised resources and organised supporters, but this counted for little unless they could give their concerns – and proposed solutions – resonance in the arena of public debate. Each time that arena was extended, its seating plan modified, its cultural acoustics adjusted, as it were, the task of gaining attention and of projecting the message had to be attempted afresh. This task of adjustment had always produced its casualties, but it had also presented new opportunities which had tended to balance out the losses and even, from the end of the French wars, possibly even from the 1790s, to amplify the resonance of moral reform rhetoric. The question which arises when dealing with developments of the 1880s, however, is whether the very design, management and acoustics of the renovated arena of public debate were inherently less suited to the presentation of

¹³⁸ ‘[Y]ou must begin as boys, not to think of other classes of boys to be your enemies’: Baden-Powell, quoted in R. Morris, ‘Clubs, Societies and Associations’, in *CSHB*, iii.424. For discussion of actual class dynamic of authority within the scouting movement, see Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, pp. 64, 86–7.

¹³⁹ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, pp. 125–6.

messages in the form of altruistic projects of moral reclamation than had, until then, been the case.

The developments which have been identified as possible distinguishing marks of a 'new era' in English public life from about this time are many, various and interrelated.¹⁴⁰ For our purposes, three broad developments are directly relevant. These are: the coming of adult male democracy in 1885 and the politics of class interest which, varying with viewpoint, was either the main text or the controlling sub-text of the political events which followed; the spread of industrial and technological modernisation beyond Britain and the rise of pressures for 'national efficiency' and market consolidation which local commercial and political elites were beginning to take into serious account from the 1870s onwards; and, culturally, the decay of assumptions about the capacity of individuals to 'master their own destiny' by exercise of 'character'.

The coming of democracy intersects with the fortunes of moral reform voluntarism in a variety of ways. We have already noted the disappointment of those who, like the NVA, saw their specific crusades swamped – for a short time, as they hoped – by the politics of party polarisation. As long as Gladstone remained in charge of the agenda of party politics they could even console themselves that public debate was essentially about the need to moralise the nation until it discharged its responsibility to give justice to Ireland and to vindicate the views of the fair-minded 'masses' over the self-interested 'classes'. As the politics of the mass electorate developed, however, it became more difficult for moral reform leaders to assume the automatic attention of either politicians or electors.

In the realm of party politics, for example, we have now seen how it became something of a party (and especially a Liberal Party) speciality to tame single-issue pressure groups by inviting them to 'work from within' local constituency organisations. This neatly absorbed their electoral energies while at the same time weakening their capacity to coerce MPs, let alone governments. The taming process had begun in the 1870s with the introduction of the secret ballot. It continued through the 1880s and 90s with the development of the locking-in device of the nationally adopted party platform with its declared policy programme.¹⁴¹ More generally, it was becoming harder for middle-class moral reform activists to pledge themselves to a single-issue cause at an election the more the agenda of politics shifted from the local to the national: such activists had now to give more serious consideration to the collateral policy damage that might result if they changed their vote or abstained. Increasingly, as well, they had to consider how much attention to give to the protection of their material interests as the

¹⁴⁰ See, e.g., Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, ch. 1.

¹⁴¹ Harrison, *Transformation of British Politics*, pp. 162, 171–2.

politics of class-based self-interest emerged to erode older patterns of culture-based loyalty in a mass electorate.¹⁴² Even the claim of moral reformers to have access to specialist knowledge and competences came into question as central government moved to gather its own information in a spreading range of areas. (The final collapse of the Social Science Association in 1886 gave melancholy evidence of the opening of the gap between professionally certified ‘experts’ and mere ‘faddists’ on that front.¹⁴³)

Against this set of developments, it was true, there emerged counter-trends, most notably reforms to local government which, between 1888 and 1894, opened certain areas of policing and social policy administration to full citizen supervision. This step, as we have seen, was eagerly exploited by many moral reformers. In addition (as historians repeatedly caution), a move to central government adoption of a national ‘welfarist’ set of policies did not necessarily supersede government respect for, or reliance on, voluntary organisations.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it did indicate that ‘the nature of the “political”’ was undergoing ‘a profound transformation’, with policy matters previously the concern of the locality, the community or the family now joining the agenda of ‘high politics’.¹⁴⁵

Why was this happening? It was happening in large part because matters once indifferent to national political elites were being recognised as necessary foundations of national capacity for adaptation and survival. For the several generations before 1870 British commercial and technological pre-eminence had hardly faced a challenge. From the time of German unification, American industrial expansion and the onset of a European race for territorial empire, this immunity could no longer be guaranteed. From the 1890s onwards, national competitiveness became an issue in open debate. British governments and British industrial employers began to give serious attention to the skill levels of the national labour force, to the level of self-sacrificial citizen loyalty available to the state for the defence of imperial interests, to the quality of the

¹⁴² This posed particular dilemmas for Nonconformists: Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, pp. 325–6.

¹⁴³ Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics*, ch. 12; B. Harrison, ‘Social Investigation and the State’, in *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 263–4, 267, 296, though note the continuing role available to ‘freelance’ individual ‘social investigators’ (pp. 281ff.).

¹⁴⁴ Thane, ‘Government and Society in England and Wales’, in *CSHB*, iii.48–50, 56; J. Harris, ‘Society and the State in Twentieth-Century Britain’, in *ibid.*, pp. 68–70. See also A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in 19th-Century England* (1999), p. 108, for the argument that ‘partnership’ gave way to state dominance only as a result of World War I, a key sign of the transformation being the formation of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations in 1919.

¹⁴⁵ S. Hall and B. Schwarz, ‘State and Society, 1880–1930’, in M. Langan and B. Schwarz (eds.), *Crises in the British State, 1880–1930* (1985), pp. 7–32 at p. 11; Price, *British Society*, pp. 226–33.

'race'.¹⁴⁶ There is a case for arguing that, in the short to medium term, these preoccupations blended harmoniously with (were even promoted by) the preoccupations of moral reform voluntarism's 'discovery' during the 1870s and 1880s of the environmental preconditions for effective cultural reclamation in 'darkest England'.¹⁴⁷ But the state preoccupation with 'merely' physical and economic aggregate outcomes which resulted in the early twentieth-century quest for 'national efficiency' was interpreted as a distinct setback by existing moral reform organisations such as the COS because it subordinated the ideal of the prudent, self-reliant citizen to the ideal of the productive national economy. It also posed problems for those still committed on grounds of principle to promoting the autonomy of 'the family' as the cradle of moral virtue.¹⁴⁸

There is also a case for arguing that economic restructuring was, by the turn of the century, starting to cause problems for moral reform voluntarism at the level of its own grass-roots as well as at the level of national policy determination. While it is difficult to gauge trends in domestic economic adjustment with the same precision as trends in national economic policy, it is clear that at some point between the 1880s and 1914 there took place a major jump towards an integrated national economy, especially in service provision. The banks were among the first to seek to expand out of a local, partnership-based form of organisation towards a national, shareholder-based one, but, by the turn of the new century, similar trends were also apparent in the newspaper, popular entertainment and mass retail industries.¹⁴⁹

This expansion in the size and complexity of business undertakings posed, potentially, two linked challenges to moral reform agencies. First, it challenged them to explain how local action could help to resolve labour market crises of 'demoralisation'. Dying industries and temporary dislocations of trade had posed dilemmas for volunteer advocates of labour market self-reliance at least since the Spitalfields silk operatives of the early decades of the century. But, as the integration of the market helped to make an ever-widening section of the workforce dependent on national and international demand, the task of the locally based moral reclamer became ever harder to define. What was giving intended to achieve and how could it be done in a way that created a

¹⁴⁶ For the ambiguous contemporary usage of 'race' as either/both cultural or/and biological concept, see Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp. 233–7.

¹⁴⁷ For the argument, see Harrison, *Transformation of British Politics*, p. 74. For a suggestive econo-cultural interpretation of London moral reform voluntarism at this point of 'crisis', see Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, chs. 14–15.

¹⁴⁸ It is also relevant to note at this point that the expansion of state investment in national 'human capital' inevitably pushed governments to tax the propertied more heavily, though there is no clear evidence that raised taxation levels encouraged the well-off to give to volunteer causes less readily, at least in the period up to 1914: Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 215–16.

¹⁴⁹ Price, *British Society*, pp. 83–5; L. Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford, 1985), ch. 2; Fraser, *Coming of the Mass Market*, chs. 9–10.

shared sense of community between giver and receiver? No doubt the foundation of associations such as the COS was part of an answer, though whether the professionalisation of volunteer effort was a solution to or an evasion of the problem of community remained to be tested.

A second development of the period, however, is sometimes argued to have added to the risk of irreversible rupture, and over a wider area than charity organisation. This development was not so much a failure to adjust operational techniques as a weakening of the will to participate – a withdrawal of local elites from previous levels of commitment to the role of paternalist, example-setting community leader. Under pressure to meet demands placed on them by impersonal market or central administrative forces beyond local control, it has sometimes been argued, employers and local elites with organising skills also lost some of the incentive to support ‘non-core’ business activities (as they now appeared to be). On the evidence available to us from the full range of moral reform voluntarism over the century it is difficult to maintain the argument that increase in scale and impersonality of economic organisation of itself erases anxiety about keeping the bonds of moral community in good repair. (The stockbrokers, bankers and government contractors who founded the Vice Society were clear examples of citizens with moral sensibilities intensively, if selectively, sharpened by experience of market amorality.) Nonetheless, after making a distinction between metropolitan and provincial experience of economic change, the evidence of the impact of commercial reorganisation on turn-of-the-century urban provincial communities does suggest a weakening level of interest in, and support for, moral reform as a strategy of status assertion by local business leaders.¹⁵⁰ As provincial urban elites had formed the backbone of a certain ‘market-purifying’ set of moral reform associations since the time of James Cropper and the slavery abolition campaign, this was a trend with damaging potential. Like the trajectory of provincial Nonconformity (which it in some ways tracked), the development suggested the end of a particular era of morally expressed civic commitment.

It may also be – in certain instances it undoubtedly was – the case that sections of key business and professional elites were showing a weakened level of interest in volunteer moral reform, not so much because of a change of perception of community role but because of a changing perception of the moral itself. It is always a temptation to take up anecdotal example as evidence of statistically unavailable (or conceptually elusive) ‘social fact’: it is, nonetheless, difficult to

¹⁵⁰ For the classic statement of the case, see S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (1976), ch. 11, esp. pp. 318–22, on Reading. For a more generally based and chronologically extended restatement of the case, see R. Trainor, ‘The Middle Class’, in Daunton, *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, iii.704–12. See also R. J. Morris, ‘Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns’, in *ibid.*, ch. 13, especially pp. 415–23; and S. Gunn, ‘The Manchester Middle Class, 1850–1880’, University of Manchester Ph.D., 1992, pp. 169–72.

avoid the conclusion that there was a major shift in the attitude of the 'serious' middle classes (religiously inclined or secular) towards the status of leisure activity over the later half of the Victorian period. Before the 1870s middle-class culture was presented (if not always practised) as a culture not just of thrift but of self-denial. From the 1870s forward (as noted in chapter 5 above) the moral status of self-denial came under review. The result was to press religious and voluntary leaders alike to at least reconsider their methods of operation. Not all went so far in their willingness to adjust as the Reading Baptist, J. J. Cooper, had managed to do by the turn of the new century:

In older times the church and the world were in antagonism, today they are merely in competition. So far the church has come off second best. She has not provided so full a choice of amusements, but she is gradually widening her selection and at the present rate of progress should soon overtake her rival.¹⁵¹

That the problem could be conceptualised in these terms, however, indicated a major cultural shift.

This adjustment of attitude came about in a tangle of interacting contexts. To some extent, middle-class practice reflected the influence of a gentlemanly ideal of hardy sportsmanship. As a first generation of an expanded intake of 'public school boys' reached adulthood after training in the character-building experience of rule-bound team games, they acted as an example to a wider group. Recreational sport could be presented as training for responsibility as well as escape from it, especially if separated from the commercial taint of gambling.¹⁵²

From another direction, middle-class practice revealed a relaxation of concern about the need to set an example of discipline to others. Much about working-class culture might still be deplored and voluntary effort directed (as we have seen, rather selectively) to guide and correct it. But Malthusian concern about scarcity of resources no longer drove this effort. Nor, for the most part, did anxiety about the potential ferocity of the deviant or deprived. The working classes were entitled to recreation to the extent that they could afford it without imposing burdens on 'the nation' – and late-century increases in working-class purchasing power helped them to afford more.¹⁵³

Finally, it can be argued, the period saw a drift among middle-class professional elites from commitment to the ideal of individual moral autonomy. Such a tendency can hardly be argued to have affected the 'general middle-class public' before 1914 – except, perhaps, in the sense of provoking fitful bursts of local commitment to older ideals of individual responsibility now apparently

¹⁵¹ Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations*, p. 318.

¹⁵² J. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 16–17, 80–6, 143–6; J. Lowerson, *Sport and the English Middle Classes 1870–1914* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 1–24, 269–70; Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, pp. 295–301.

¹⁵³ See note 129 above.

being subverted.¹⁵⁴ Yet the growth in the influence and prestige of professional expertise in public policy-making in the period after 1880 is a documentable trend in key areas of concern to moral reformers – as is the extension of state powers to enforce policy even at the expense of respect for individual or family responsibility.¹⁵⁵ The effect on those promoting moral reform as a project of discipline for self-responsibility was, over the medium term, energy-draining. ‘I would prefer to have under my charge a hundred wicked, desperate men, rather than fifty of these poor weaklings’, wrote a Howard Association correspondent of William Tallack:

With God’s good grace, I may exercise a good influence on the strong-minded man. The moment this is done, his environment begins to improve and my labour lightens. But it never lightens with the weakling; and though he may learn to love men, and I may feel that I have an influence with him, he knows, and I know, that as soon as I let him go, back to his misery and what we call his sin, he certainly goes. Pathological and social causes are too powerful.¹⁵⁶

As Martin Wiener sums it up, ‘causalism’ was replacing ‘moralism’.¹⁵⁷ Society’s deviants were more effectively reclaimed by professionally administered therapy than by amateurish attempts to prop up a hypothetical moral self.

As a result of these developments the moral reform tradition of public action was significantly weakened. It is not possible to identify a single turning point but, sometime in the lifetime of the generation which had reached independent adulthood in the 1880s, ‘moral reform’ lost its resonance in public debate. As we have seen, it was partly a matter of being elbowed to the side of the stage, partly of losing the attention of the audience, partly also, among some, of losing faith in the message being delivered. The coming of the politics of the party platform faced independent pressure groups with a dilemma – co-option or the threat of exclusion. The class-tinged politics of the mass electorate tended to swamp the efforts of ‘altruistic elites’ at the same time as its discourse of group self-interest cast doubt on the ability of social and cultural elites to act in a disinterested way. This doubt was mitigated to the extent that moral reform could be presented as a demonstration of the credentials of good citizenship but accentuated when, in an age of extended consumption choices, it was presented as a form of self-denial at odds both with commercial inducement and with the

¹⁵⁴ See note 109 above.

¹⁵⁵ Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, chs. 5–6; Price, *British Society*, ch. 6.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Holmes to William Tallack [c. 1905], Tallack, *Howard Letters*, p. 202, quoted in Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, p. 351. For a variant version of the same anxiety, focused on the character formation of the moral reclainer rather than on that of the reclaimed, see Diary of C. S. Loch, 26 June 1879, University of London, Department of Palaeography MS 801: ‘The looking for results impairs the self-sacrifice. It is a sacrifice no longer.’

¹⁵⁷ Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal*, p. 338.

normal behaviour of the better-off. The 'professionalisation' road out of this impasse gave a reasonable prospect of success in revalidating the credentials of moral reformers, especially in those areas of activity (crime, poverty, health and education) which were of direct concern to the state. But it came at the cost of differentiation of roles of expertise to an extent which inevitably left a residue of non-specialist 'moral reformers' resentful and suspicious of professionalism as an escape route from the responsibility of wider moral reflection. It also came, as C. S. Loch had sensed, at the cost of the ability to maximise 'community participation'. Community-based associational initiatives might still be launched but they tended increasingly to take the form of lobby groups to negotiate for access to state and 'public' resources. '[T]he private self-governing pluralism of Victorian society' was being destabilised by the combined effects of state and market 'integration' of national life.¹⁵⁸

This did not mean that 'moral reform' as a way of envisioning and debating public issues was dead. This was hardly possible. The moralising way of judging situations as outcomes of human sinfulness or individual character defect continued to co-exist with professional diagnoses of the same situations as examples of social pathology inviting therapeutic solution. And new projects of moral transformation continued to be envisioned – though the social policy experts and activists who envisioned them were increasingly inclined to present them as state-sponsored projects of structural social transformation rather than as volunteer projects for the moral reclamation of individuals.¹⁵⁹

It did mean, nonetheless, that a tradition of volunteer associational mobilisation had largely run its course. The age of William Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry, Shaftesbury, William Shaen, Josephine Butler and W. T. Stead was failing to transmit its vision of non-sectarian, hierarchical yet community-based active

¹⁵⁸ Harris, 'Society and the State', pp. 113–14, and see also pp. 67–70. This evaluation has recently been reasserted and used as a point of entry to the exploration of the fortunes of associational voluntarism in the twentieth-century United States: R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000). While the chronology of 'rise and fall' which Putnam outlines is not easy to relate directly to the English case, the distinction which he makes (ch. 3) between an older generation of 'citizen member' organisations and a more recent generation of 'mailing-list' associations is a powerful one. His prototype example (pp. 154–60) of the modern environmental movement as a centrally controlled, professionally managed pressure group with little commitment to encourage active 'grass-roots' participation by its subscriber membership is obviously not universally applicable to twentieth-century moral reform movements, nor to all branches of the British environmental movement. (See, e.g., A. Lent, *British Social Movements since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 149–53, though cf. 185–9.) It does, nonetheless, clearly flag the context in which contemporary moral reform movements operate – a context of 'big government', professional expertise and corporate business organisation.

¹⁵⁹ For the 'socialist challenge' to temperance, see Harrison, *Drink*, ch. 17; Shiman, *Crusade against Drink*, pp. 240–8. For similar movements from 'moral' to 'political' approaches to charitable relief, see Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, ch. 2; and on gender equality, S. S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy. Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1986).

citizenship to a new generation.¹⁶⁰ A tradition of self-consciously altruistic ‘public service’, self-funded and distinct from either religious or party political purpose and form, was running out of belief in its mission.

¹⁶⁰ B. Harrison, ‘A Genealogy of Reform in Modern Britain’, in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform. Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), pp. 119–48; Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse*, pp. 79–80. A more ‘personalised’ chronology of ‘transmission failure’ would perhaps note the markers provided by the death of Shaftesbury (allegedly giving his 1885 death-bed blessing to Stead’s social purity crusade: *Sentinel*, 1885, p. 512), and by the death of Stead himself (who went down with the *Titanic* in 1912).

Conclusion

We began this book by noting that all attempts to establish moral order necessarily operate within a cultural frame. In the period we have explored, the cultural frame has been provided in varying combinations, by systems of religious belief and practice, of economic thought and organisation, and of socio-political hierarchy; also by assumptions about gender and by discourses of professional expertise. What conclusions can usefully be drawn from the survey of activity, now completed?

It will be recalled that one of the more repeated findings has been that moral reform was the exclusive territory neither of discipline-enforcing cultural insiders fearing displacement nor of credential-asserting outsiders demanding wider social recognition. It was, according to time and circumstance, both, neither and a blend of each. Looking rather more closely, we can trace three broad strands of contemporary justification for commitment to projects of moral reform.¹

The justification which was probably the most constantly in use was a strand of association linking moral reform with policy concern about the social and cultural implications of economic change. (The qualification 'probably' is added because there comes a point around the 1870s when, as we have seen, anxieties about the stability of urban working-class culture at last start to recede.) The motives for interest in moral reform of working-class character were, of course, intimately tied to the coming of a state-encouraged, increasingly nationally integrated market economy for urban and agricultural communities alike. The tripwires of concern were not just matters related to work discipline: they also included urges to 'modernise' the operation of institutions of state authority, and to lessen the burdens of national and local taxation, as well as to protect property, and to set new standards of public safety and urban amenity. Those aroused might be either optimists or pessimists about the likely impact of commercial growth on communal well-being and cohesion. In practice, however, they tended to present themselves as sponsors of projects of adjustment to market-organised society rather than as protectors of adult individuals from its operation. The preferred methods of operation of those motivated by this

¹ Cf. Innes, 'Politics and Morals', pp. 58–9.

type of moral reform sentiment were notably dependent on perceptions of good order. That is, they were ready sponsors of specialist projects of policing when circumstances looked threatening, but open to experiments in environmental subsidy to moral habit-formation in more promising times. In the footsteps of Adam Smith (and indeed of Malthus in his later versions), they hoped to see eventual cultural salvation emerge from a process of domestication of labouring-class desires – wasteful, unaffordable ‘luxuries’ displaced by sober, affordable ‘comforts’.² This periodically led them into tension with a more volatile but almost equally persistent strand of moral reform enthusiasm – the evangelical.

Evangelical moral reformers were, in most respects, as committed to the ideal of domestically based individual responsibility in a market-organised society as their more pragmatic or rationalist allies, though their vision of moral order depended on rather different sanctions and rewards. Starting out from a conviction of the fallen nature of humanity, and of the burden of debt for sin requiring discharge before salvation could be hoped for, evangelical moral reform tended to interpret the coming of a market-organised society as a divinely sanctioned plan for the testing of spiritual and moral resolve. And, as we have seen, during both the French wars and the periods of ‘Protestant national identity’ crisis towards the mid-nineteenth century, evangelicals were inclined (on inherited Old Testament ‘elect nation’ grounds) to interpret moments of domestic and international political tension as signs of testing in faithfulness to the divine will as well. Stakes were raised in these situations because national salvation was seen to be in the balance. When divine displeasure seemed directed at the whole society (as most notably during some phases of the French wars) commitment to biblical command tended to bond evangelicals with a much wider range of ‘cultural traditionalists’.

The reverse side of the coin of evangelical reproof of moral transgression as ‘sin’, of course, was the obligation of true Christians to love the sinner and attempt reclamation. To do otherwise was to risk their own souls. In many cases that sense of obligation made evangelicals more willing than others to take the step from denunciation of barbarity, sin or neglect to active intervention, and we have seen the proof of this in the foundation committee lists of most of the ‘symbolic’ moral rescue movements of the period from slave trade abolition to social purity. Yet, from the mid-eighteenth-century discovery of ‘sympathetic feeling’, through to the nineteenth-century phase of solidified commitment to the romanticisation of female virtue, evangelicals were usually as much participants in a wider cultural revaluation of the significance of sacrifice and suffering as its sole articulators. The distinctive evangelical contribution to moral reform

² Cf. M. Roberts, ‘The Concept of Luxury in British Political Economy: Adam Smith to Alfred Marshall’, *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (1998), pp. 23–47.

lay more in the intensity and persistence of commitment than in monopoly over choice of 'objects of moral concern'.

The third strand of justification for commitment to moral reform was more explicitly political in its presentation, though its users were more often than not inclined to deploy it in combination with a victim-rescuing or character-assisting justification of the religious or economy-adjusting type. This was a justification which rested on a perception that, in public life, virtuous action for the common good was always at risk of defeat by corrupt or complacent self-interest. In the later eighteenth century, as we recall, the Proclamation Society had been launched with the support of men seeking ways of re-establishing the supremacy of 'public spirit' over 'private interest'. Thereafter, the conventional 'classical republican' attempts of the 1780s to recall hereditary elites to a sense of public duty gave way to more unsettling nineteenth-century debates over the criteria of fitness for being entrusted with authority in general. In these circumstances moral reform often became the symbolic battle-ground across which participants and would-be participants in public life struggled to establish their entitlement to recognition and authority.³

The archetypal symbolic struggle in assertion of 'national honour' (and of worthiness to enjoy the protection of the Almighty) was the campaign to abolish slavery – and then to control the situations in which the metaphor of slavery could credibly be deployed. Yet this was not the only example: as the narrative of each chapter here has revealed, much of the nineteenth-century debate about fitness for citizenship took place in the form of competitive display of moral credentials in which one mobilisation led to another.

Two aspects of this process are especially noteworthy. First, this was a series of debates from which no major social or occupational grouping could afford to abstain. Modernising critics of the existing social and political order pushed from one direction on the grounds that 'public attention' needed to be 'diverted from mere contests for power to those higher and more important considerations which affect the welfare and morality of the lower orders'. Privilege-justifying defenders of a Protestant paternalist land-based public order pledged self-sacrificially from another direction to 'devote whatever advantages He might have bestowed on me to the cause of the weak, the helpless, both man and beast, and those who had no one to help them'.⁴

Second, campaigns of moral vindication required not merely denunciation of moral fault in others but purification of motive in oneself – a train of association which helps to explain the chronic anxiety of the more culture-sensitive sections of the commercial and professional middle-classes about the need to

³ S. Rose, 'Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses', in V. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley CA, 1999), pp. 228–33.

⁴ Respectively Fowell Buxton in 1818 (cited in chapter 3, note 101); Shaftesbury in 1880 (chapter 5, note 101).

keep revalidating their own moral credentials across the period explored here. Few were as compulsively driven to account for their ‘stewardship’ of material resources as Joseph Sturge with his maxim of making ‘reparation to Society . . . by exhibiting an example of true moderation in Trade (not living to trade but trading to live)’⁵ but the idea that the business community was in some way morally responsible to the wider community for the activities of all its members led to some notable campaigns to ‘vindicate the honour of commerce’.⁶ (It was not an accident that publishers and booksellers were significant participants in the founding of the Vice Society in 1802 – and journalists and editors in the founding of the National Vigilance Association in 1886.⁷) Middle-class society depended for its collective peace of mind on being able to recognise a limit to the legitimate operation of market forces and to patrol that limit – on behalf of all classes. Where that limit might fall remained a matter of debate. (Where, notably, did legal prohibitions on shameful forms of trade/consumption, or market subsidy of admirable forms of self-help, end, and the undermining of incentive to family-assisted moral self-reliance begin?) Nonetheless, the belief that the market might (at least in the short-to-medium term) corrupt, injure and wrong those vulnerable to its power was a belief which acted as a powerful incentive to volunteer moral reform activity across the period.⁸

What of the impact and outcomes of moral reform efforts? How much difference did moral reform activity make, once volunteers had committed themselves? The most obvious measure is the impact on the behaviour of the ‘objects’ of moral reform attention – predominantly, but not exclusively, the labouring classes. It is generally accepted that English culture, including working-class culture, became less violent, more self-disciplined as a mature market-organised society emerged over the period between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries – the period in which moral reform voluntarism flourished. It is not credible to claim the whole of this culture shift as a triumph for moral reform campaigners. Technology, among other influences, gave public authority new weapons of surveillance and control. Technology, in combination with work routines and urban commercial leisure experience, encouraged greater restraint in behaviour. A more stable economy and more reliable wage and employment prospects assisted (eventually) the spread of ‘working-class respectability’.⁹

⁵ Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge*, p. 31.

⁶ Henry Thornton (1792), quoted in Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 390.

⁷ Other campaigns, as Morris has rightly noted (*Class, Sect and Party*, pp. 15, 259–60), aimed to protect immature or morally vulnerable sections of middle-class society itself from market contamination.

⁸ For much the same conclusion even more expansively stated in relation to the emergence of American mass consumer culture in the twentieth century, see G. Cross, *An All-Consuming Society* (New York, 2000), p. 15: ‘Regulation justified an expanding horizon of consumption by the very fact that it set boundaries.’

⁹ M. Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 133–56; Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, esp. pp. 288–9; Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, ch. 4.

Yet volunteer experimental effort at the very least eased the transition from a predominantly rural, face-to-face society to a predominantly urban, class-segregated one. In addition, volunteer forms of operation, once accepted as 'safe' by civil and ecclesiastical authority, were open to all with the energy to adopt them. As the nineteenth century unfolded, this gave an opportunity for some working people to transform themselves (as temperance activists did) from being the objects of moral reform to being its practitioners – a transformation sometimes welcomed, sometimes greeted with startled puzzlement.¹⁰

Self-transformation was less dramatically achieved in the lives of most recruits to moral reform than it was in the case of pledge-taking teetotallers. Indeed, as we have seen when noting the operational setbacks of schemes of 'community co-ordination' such as those of the Mendicity Society and the COS, it is possible to overstate the level of commitment achieved by moral reform organisations. On the other hand, petitions and addresses signed by the million do not emerge without widespread, sustained effort – a consideration which alerts us to a second measure of moral reform impact. This is the impact on the lives of the volunteer participants themselves.

Participation is a notoriously difficult concept to calibrate. Clearly, 'deep' participation, such as that of a prison visitor or temperance community member, stands a long way from the 'shallower' participation of a subscriber, literature-distributor or petition-signer. Yet even shallow participation builds a sense of community when it is able to establish a sense of belonging to a symbolically linked network of the like-minded.¹¹ Certainly, the evidence collected in this survey indicates a considerable impact, both in the creation of a sense of middle-class cultural mission (undertaken by an elite but approved by many), and in the creation of a sense of cross-class, cross-regional 'national opinion' on certain morally charged issues from slavery to child abuse. Again, moral reform campaigners were beneficiaries of developments in public life generally, most notably the long period of debate about, and incremental enactment of, parliamentary reform. This helped to energise both the politically privileged and also the excluded. Yet it was 'moral reform' as a series of issues readily related to by voters and non-voters alike that in turn helped to spread national political awareness and debate about the foundations of citizenship.

Does this mean that moral reform contributed to the building of a functioning civil society in England – a society stabilised and strengthened in its powers of creative adaptation by the operation of a public sphere of 'rational-critical inquiry to keep the state in touch with the needs of society . . . through the vehicle

¹⁰ See, e.g., confrontation between the retired civil servant, Sir Charles Trevelyan, and the London trade union leader, George Howell, reported in *Meeting of the Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity* (1870), pp. 17–22 and 28–30.

¹¹ See R. Putnam on 'tertiary' organisations, *Bowling Alone*, pp. 156–61. Cf. A. Vickery's comments on types of political engagement in 'Introduction' to A. Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege, and Power. British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford CA, 2001), pp. 2–5.

of public opinion’?¹² Did moral reform voluntarism act as a major generator of ‘social capital’, the more so because its avowedly altruistic purpose encouraged ‘habits of co-operation and public-spiritedness’ and ‘practical skills necessary to partake in public life’?¹³ And, if so, how much of the legacy remains transferable to the present?

On the face of it, as we have now seen, moral reform movements made a significant contribution to the emergence of a society capable of debating issues in a way which led neither to violent confrontation nor to coercion, and by methods which remained relatively uncoerced either by the state or by ‘market forces’. (These last forces, it will be recalled, Habermas identified as the eventual nemesis of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ (p. 13).) From time to time, however, doubts have been raised about the exact nature of ‘rational-critical debate’ in the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ as it took place over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first doubt centres on citizen access to the arena of debate. The second centres on the type of citizen commitment compatible with ‘rational-critical debate’ – that is, debate which leads to fruitful negotiation rather than irreconcilable ‘tribal’ confrontation.

Taking up the issue of access, we note that Habermas specifically identified his rational-critical public sphere as open on terms of equality to all with powers of intellectual persuasion. The extent to which that ever described an identifiable social situation has been doubted, especially by historians of labour and by researchers in women’s history. Given the rise of class-consciousness and of ‘separate spheres’ of legitimate activity for men and women, it has been argued, the idea of a single ‘rational-critical’ public sphere sounds like a recipe either for exclusion of women and the working classes or for the development of multiple spheres, not all of them (maybe none of them) ‘rational-critical’.¹⁴

On the evidence of the moral reform campaigns surveyed in this book, this is a criticism of some persuasiveness in some situations. The role of the labouring classes in moral reform debate, for example, was certainly significant from the time of antislavery mobilisation forward, and increasingly sought by middle-class leaders once the political system made tactical alliance useful.¹⁵ Yet, once the teetotal temperance movement had retired from active recruitment

¹² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 31.

¹³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p. 338.

¹⁴ On the non-bourgeois public sphere, see G. Eley, ‘Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures’, in Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 303–6, 325–31. On the problem of conceptualising and evidencing the existence of a female public sphere, see, *inter alia*, L. Davidoff, ‘Regarding some “Old Husbands’ Tales”: Public and Private in Feminist History’, in *Worlds Between. Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 227–76, esp. pp. 238–49; J. Rendall, ‘Women and the Public Sphere’, *Gender and History*, 11 (1999), pp. 475–88, esp. pp. 479–83. On the public sphere as a space based on sociability – ‘emotional exchange’ rather than ‘critical reasoning or the public display of civic “virtue”’ – see F. Trentmann, *Paradoxes of Civil Society* (New York, 2000), pp. 24–8.

¹⁵ As we have seen in chapter 5 above, participation in the middle-class-led campaigns against the CD Acts, and for social purity, spread well beyond ‘the cultural middle classes’.

by mid-century, the worlds of ‘evangelical moral reform’ and of the labouring population did tend to mutual exclusion, even mutual hostility.¹⁶ In the case of middle-class women’s participation in moral reform, roughly the reverse holds true. That is, evidence suggests that middle-class women *were* marginalised as participants in public political debate during the period up to, say, the radicalisation of the antislavery movement in the 1820s, and as participants in public debates about the application of professional expertise until the foundation of the Social Science Association in 1857.¹⁷ Thereafter, and especially from the 1860s forward, however, it seems more convincing to argue that moral reform voluntarism – the protection of domestic virtue by public mobilisation – actually became the means by which women made a successful claim for recognition as legitimate participants in rational-critical debate.

That evaluation, however, depends in turn on how one resolves the second doubt – the definition of the limits of ‘rational-critical debate’. There is, as many have noted, at the very least, a tension between the ‘cool’ techniques of literary debate and the ‘hot’, emotional and potentially ‘irrational’ techniques of volunteer-organised mass agitation for the achievement of culturally symbolic goals such as slavery abolition and child protection.¹⁸ How are moral reform activists to be classified? We may rely, to a degree, on a characterisation of English society as one inoculated against the more extreme forms of confrontation by the concession of religious toleration in 1689. This, in turn, it can be argued, gave continuing legitimation for a tradition of tolerated conflict in ‘rational-critical’ public debate.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the ‘puritan’ vision of a godly society brought into being by legal coercion if necessary was not dead in the eighteenth century, and, as we have seen, had a way of reviving. In practice it seems fair to suggest that the public sphere of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England was never as rational-critical as a strict definition of the term would require.

These shadows on the record aside, the one impact of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century moral reform associational effort that is impossible to doubt concerns its effectiveness as an independent generator of agendas for public debate. A tradition of public action undertaken out of ‘concern for the

¹⁶ Cf. Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 132–50. See also Trentmann, *Paradoxes of Civil Society*, p. 4: ‘[T]he project of extending civil society went hand in hand with an identification of “lower” types of social relations [needing reform]’.

¹⁷ Cf. Vickery, *Women, Privilege, and Power*, pp. 14–30; Summers, *Female Lives, Moral States*, pp. 17–18, 25–6.

¹⁸ Trentmann, *Paradoxes of Civil Society*, pp. 21–3, 24–8.

¹⁹ The point is noted by Calhoun, *Habermas*, pp. 35–6, but the idea may be traced back at least to Voltaire: ‘If one religion only were allowed in England, the government would very possibly become arbitrary; if there were but two, the people would cut one another’s throats; but as there are such a multitude, they all live happy and in peace’ (*Lettres Anglaises* (1733), letter 6: ‘On the Presbyterians’). Cf., however, Trentmann, *Paradoxes of Civil Society*, pp. 34–6.

generalised other', and in full awareness that it might expose participants to disapproval, dismissal and ridicule from vested interests and the culturally complacent, is one that idealises the role of ideas and of citizen commitment. It therefore attracts the ready attention of political scientists in search of the ideal type of the 'mediating institution' – the sort of organisation that creates space for citizens to gain a sense of the rewards of trusting engagement with a broad range of fellow citizens and with the state, and also to practise the skills needed. It is this aspect of voluntarism generally that has been most valued by contemporary theorists of participatory democracy.²⁰

Even here, however, there remain problems of cultural comparison to take into account before claiming any past embodiment of civil society as 'some kind of Ur-democracy with the potential to act as a panacea for contemporary ills' of citizen non-involvement.²¹ The original enthusiasm of Habermas for 'the bourgeois public sphere' was fairly clearly an enthusiasm for a form of public life *unlike* that of the time in which he wrote. As he (and others since) have interpreted it, the modern citizen is inhibited from seeking to participate by the manipulations of big government, big business and the mass media, each supported by its own army of 'highly specialised experts'. This situation stands in contrast to the opportunities to initiate debate about values and social goals available to participants in public life in the age of the bourgeois public sphere.²²

The question then arises whether it might be possible to encourage the recreation of a bourgeois public sphere – to which the answer is, paradoxically, maybe yes, but on conditions that would be unlikely to gain moral approval from those seeking to promote 'civility'. The moral reform tradition explored here was indeed successful in gaining public space for consideration of its agendas by a process of 'principled rivalry'.²³ But it was a tradition dependent at the very least on the relatively unchallenged existence of inequalities of income, status and gender role which gave moral reform activists (male and female) their resources, 'free time' and public standing. It also depended in turn on cultural traditions and institutions which allowed access to networks of communication and encouraged (by modern voluntarist standards) relatively high levels of active, self-confident participation – self-confident because organised on the basis of locality, or at least of pre-existing, semi-autonomous networks of community difficult to reconcile with the centralised and standardised systems

²⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p. 340; and see p. 341: 'Democracy is not a spectator sport'. See also Habermas, 'Further Reflections', in Calhoun, *Habermas*, p. 455.

²¹ Trentmann, *Paradoxes of Civil Society*, pp. 39–40.

²² Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, chs. 19–20, and see p. 233; also Habermas, 'Further Reflections', p. 455.

²³ For the phrase, see F. Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse. Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (1988), p. 89.

expected/practised by even the most consciously self-limiting political regimes of the twentieth century and after.²⁴ In addition, it was a tradition dependent on a willingness to challenge or bypass the expertise of conventionally certified professionals to a degree which contemporary society might well blench at contemplating. The paradox presented above is thus resolved by noting once again that moral values ‘make best sense’ only within their overarching cultural context; and ‘altruistic social action’, like ‘civility’, ‘needs to be historicized’.²⁵

For this reason we must conclude by acknowledging that, in exploring an age of moral reform, we have been exploring a historically specific phase in cultural adjustment – a phase, useful in its time, which ended with the stabilisation of the Victorian political system and the integration of local cultures into a national one. As I have attempted to argue here, moral reform was indeed a weapon in the cultural armoury of an emergent urban middle class, and of its professional and commercial elites in particular. By means of its discourses these elites made sense of their own obligations to others in a fluid and unstable culture; they also helped to convince significant numbers of their own and of other classes to see the world in a particular – hierarchical yet community-seeking – way. In an ‘age of transition’ this made a difference. Once the transition was complete, the approach began to lose its credibility and appeal.

Yet it is difficult to resist also acknowledging that, in more diffuse form, the search for civility and for the morally sensitised society continues. It may be that this search is now pursued through associations which are more ‘instrumental’ in approach – more concerned to influence the allocation of public resources than to stimulate the exercise of citizen self-reliance in the manner most favoured by voluntarists of the nineteenth century. Yet it continues. It continues in some cases despite, but more often precisely because of, the continuing provocations offered by state and professional authority, and most of all because of attempts by the market to transform citizens into consumers. It shows no sign of abatement. It would, on the historical record of the English experience, be a sign of major cultural loss were it ever to do so. To adapt one of the less strident of the sayings of Edmund Burke,²⁶ a society without the means of adjusting its moral values is a society without the means of its conservation. The contribution of associations of citizen volunteers to that process of adjustment has been and remains an irreplaceable one.

²⁴ See chapter 6, note 158 above. ²⁵ Trentmann, *Paradoxes of Civil Society*, p. 23.

²⁶ Cf. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): ‘A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation.’

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