

Woman's Mission to Woman: Explorations in the Operation of the Double Standard and Female Solidarity in Nineteenth Century England

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This article attempts to examine one essential aspect of the double standard: the separation of women into two distinct classes, the pure and the impure; and the overcoming of the sanctions against communication between them through the involvement of pure women in rescue work with prostitutes and fallen women.¹ The traditional basis of the double standard was the idea that male sexual needs were so overwhelmingly strong that if men were not provided with outlets in the form of easily available prostitutes, they would be driven to raping the wives and daughters of other men, and thus destroying the foundations of civilised society. In the course of the nineteenth century a new reason was added to the arguments for the necessity of prostitution: the inevitability of male engagement in masturbation and homosexual intercourse if denied heterosexual outlets. Both practices were considered to be much more damaging to men's physical and mental health than "impure" heterosexual intercourse.²

The study of how women themselves tried to overcome the separation of their sex into pure and impure by involving themselves in charitable work with the fallen, dramatically illustrates the development of female solidarity within the Women's Movement. In many ways it is the bedrock upon which later campaigns for education, employment, the

* The National Library of Canada, Ottawa. The author would like to thank Suzann Buckley, Leonore Davidoff, and Deborah Gorham for their comments on successive drafts of this paper.

¹ Some manifestations of the operation of the double standard in Britain are described in Keith THOMAS, "The Double Standard," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XX (1959): 195-216. The psychological effects upon the female psyche are discussed by Peter COMINOS, "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict," in *Suffer and be Still; Women in the Victorian Age*, Martha VICINUS, ed. (Bloomington, Ind., 1972), pp. 155-72.

² Michael RYAN, *Prostitution in London* (1838), p. 84; Frances NEWMAN, *The Theory and Results of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869* (London, 1870?), p. 6. The familiar evils of prostitution... were minor compared to a society where "the monstrous conception of a Marquis de Sade seems to have received the sanction and notoriety of general custom"; A. J. HAMMERTON, "Without Natural Protectors: Female Immigration to Australia, 1832-36," *Historical Studies*, 16 (1975): 539-66; Robert H. MACDONALD, "The frightful consequences of onanism: notes on the history of a delusion," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXVIII (1967): 423-31.

franchise and removal of legal disabilities was based.³ The sources are the multifarious writings on women's nature, role, and duties which were such a marked feature of nineteenth-century middlebrow literature; the annual reports and other publications of institutions devoted to the rescue of prostitutes and to the protection of women; and the pamphlets and letters of those women involved in Woman's Mission, particularly those active in the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts and the Social Purity movement.⁴ The central idea of Woman's Mission, that is, that the pure woman was enabled by the very possession of her purity to understand and to help the impure far better than the most sympathetic man, was used by both feminist and non-feminist women.

In the mid-nineteenth century William Augustus Lecky wrote a two-volume work entitled *The History of European Morals*, in which is found the quintessential expression of Victorian thought on the double standard. The only part of morality which concerns women was, of course, sexual morality. Woman's nature was such, Lecky carefully explained, that she was *naturally* morally superior to man. She was a purer, finer, altogether more elevated being, but in order for some women to be what they naturally were a certain number had to become something else: to satisfy the brutal sexual needs of morally inferior man some women had to become those degraded and unnatural beings, prostitutes. As Lecky wrote:

The prostitute is a figure which is certainly the most mournful, and in some respects the most awful, upon which the eye of the moralist can dwell. That unhappy being whose very name is a shame to speak; who counterfeits with a cold heart the transports of affection, and submits herself as the passive instrument of lust; who is scorned and insulted as the vilest of her sex, and doomed for the most part, to disease and abject wretchedness and an early death, appears in every age as the perpetual symbol of the degradation and sinfulness of man. Herself the supreme type of vice, she is ultimately the most efficient guardian of virtue. But for her the unchallenged purity of countless happy homes would be polluted, and not a few who, in the pride of their untempted chastity, think of her with an indignant shudder, would have known the agony of remorse and despair.⁵

³ Two American historians have traced a similar development of feminist consciousness in the United States in the 1830s and 1840s. Cartoll SMITH-ROSENBERG in "Beauty, the Beast and the militant woman," *American Quarterly* (1971), describes the work of the New York Moral Reform Society, which attempted to break the basis of the double standard by offering help to women who had been sexually exploited. Barbara J. Berg in her work on women's philanthropic societies in Eastern cities, analyses the virulent opposition that feminine attempts to help deviant women aroused in antebellum America and the way in which this resistance induced women to reevaluate their own position in society; Barbara J. BERG, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism, 1800-1860* (New York, 1977).

⁴ The campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts is described in E. SIGSWORTH and J. WYKE, "A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease," in *Suffer and be Still...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-79; and Judith R. WALKOWITZ and Daniel WALKOWITZ, "We are not beasts of the field. Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, Mary HARTMAN and Lois BANNER, eds. (New York, 1974), pp. 192-225.

⁵ William Augustus LECKY, *The History of European Morals* (London, 1869), II, pp. 380 and 385.

The *virtuous* were supposed to be indignant, not to sympathise or appreciate the sacrifice of the degraded. One of the clichés reiterated again and again by male writers on prostitution was that while *they* were willing to tolerate and understand prostitutes, the virtuous women they knew were so unjustly hard and cruel that they could never hope to change social attitudes. As we shall see this was not true; virtuous women became deeply concerned, and made horrible discoveries about the men in their own lives who had set up the double standard system. All too often their fathers, husbands, and brothers were themselves the clients of prostitutes.

An article in the *Quarterly Review* of 1848 perfectly expresses the reason why virtuous women should not only know nothing of the life of the fallen, but should also be carefully kept from contact with the repentant woman:

We object *in toto* to Ladies Committees (in Penitentiaries). We cannot think a board of ladies well suited to this class of objects. Often the very tenderness of their natures would stand in the way of proper treatment for true pity often requires a mixture of severity. Since, moreover, we are standing forth as the practical opponents of false modesty and false shame, by giving prominence to such a subject as this, we may express a doubt whether it is advisable for pure-minded women to put themselves in the way of such a knowledge of evil as must be learnt in dealing with the fallen members of their sex.⁶

The contaminating power of the fallen women is a constant theme in the literature of prostitution. As the same article remarks:

Every woman rejected from their (the Penitentiary's) door, returns to her trade of contamination, our population receives again a poison that it might have escaped; those who stand aloof from such a subject may suffer in their own families from the tide of iniquity they would do nothing to check.⁷

The earliest writers on prostitution as a social problem (differentiated from earlier thinkers who regarded it as a sin to be eradicated rather than a necessity to be regulated) were men. Certainly there was no discussion of the possibility that respectable women should concern themselves with prostitutes. Running through the pamphlets of Daniel Defoe, Saunders Welch, and John Fielding are themes which would be constantly reiterated when prostitution was under discussion in the nineteenth century.⁸ Basically each writer accepted the idea that prostitution was a constant feature of society; their aim was to mitigate its more destructive features for the sake of the male population, be they clients or no. Particularly interesting is Bernard Mandeville who seems to be the first to advocate state brothels

⁶ *Quarterly Review* (1848): 375-76.

⁷ The many parallels between physical cleanliness and social and moral purity (reflected in the approval which greeted the creation of the Ladies Sanitary Association for example) have been discussed in Leonore DAVIDOFF, "The Rationalization of Housework," in *Dependency and Exploitation in Work and Marriage; papers from the 1974 B.S.A. Conference*, Sheila ALLEN and Diana Leonard BARKER, eds. (London, 1976).

⁸ Daniel DEFOE, *Observations upon Street Walkers; with a plan for Lessening the present number of them* (London, 1726); Saunders WELCH, *A Proposal to Render Effectual a Plan to Remove the Nuisance of Common Prostitutes from the Streets of this Metropolis* (London, 1758); John FIELDING, *A Plan for the Preservatory and Reformatory for preserving Deserted Girls* (London, 1758); Bernard MANDEVILLE, *A Modest Defence of the Public Stews* (London, 1724).

and compulsory medical inspection of women on sanitary grounds. This was the main justification for regulation invoked by medical propagandists of the nineteenth century. There was no suggestion on the part of the eighteenth-century writers that the eradication or suppression of prostitution would be a social improvement.

The two eighteenth-century institutions specifically designed for prostitutes were the Magdalen Hospital (established 1758) and the Lock Asylum (1787). Both were established by subscription, were planned and run by humanitarian upper-class gentlemen, received a very small number of applicants, and tried to train the inmates for domestic service. There was little moral censure or attempt to induce a sense of sin in the women:

The treatment of the women is of the gentlest kind. They are instructed in the principles of the Christian Religion, in reading, in several kinds of work, and the various branches of household employment, wherein they may honestly earn their bread.⁹

It was expected that women passing through these two institutions would be placed in domestic service. Women were involved in the administration of both institutions only as matrons; a Ladies' Committee for the Magdalen Hospital was only suggested in 1915.¹⁰

It was Patrick Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* which added the two final ideas to the nexus which was to form the basis of Victorian thinking about prostitution as a social problem. The police, he felt, had a vital duty not only in controlling "the Shocking behaviour of women of the Town" but also in keeping them from offending the sight of modest and respectable women. The double standard demanded that good women should know nothing of the existence of bad women, for knowledge could immediately corrupt female purity. Police regulation, Colquhoun stated, would protect

...the ears and eyes of the wives and daughters of the modest and unoffending citizens, who cannot afford to travel in carriages, [so they] would no longer be insulted by gross and polluted language and great indecency of behaviour, while walking the streets. Indeed it is to be feared, that the force of evil for example, in unavoidably witnessing such scenes, may have debauched many females, who might otherwise have lived a virtuous and useful life.¹¹

By contrast, the dominant idea of early nineteenth-century thinking on prostitution was the recognition of the social necessity for the existence of prostitutes as a class, combined with attempts to "rescue" as many individuals as possible from this degraded state. For the first time enquiry was made about the reasons for women becoming prostitutes but the explanations reveal more of the evangelical interests of the founders than of the actual condition of the women. The greatest number were stated to

⁹ *By-Laws and Regulations of the Magdalen Hospital* (London, 1816); *An Account of the Lock Hospital* (London, 1802). Laundry work was one of the major occupations taught in penitentiaries.

¹⁰ H.F.B. COMPSTON, *A Short Account of the Magdalen Hospital* (London, 1923), p. 7.

¹¹ Patrick COLQUHOUN, *A Treatise of the Police of the Metropolis, containing a detail of the various crimes and misdemeanours, etc.*, 5th ed. (London, 1797), p. 342.

have been betrayed by false promises of marriage, while others had come to the city in hopes of higher wages and better clothes, or had been led astray while attending country fairs or other popular festivals.

Two new institutions were founded in the early years of the century, the London Female Penitentiary (founded 1807) and the Asylum of the Guardian Society for the Preservation of Public Morals (founded 1816).¹² The aim of the latter society was "to check the progress of female depravity, whereby to preserve public morals from contamination;" its harshness of tone was typical of these new institutions, which showed little sympathy for the plight of the women and much concern for the supposed rapid increase in the prevalence of prostitution,¹³ and the lack of public recognition of its contaminating effect, "*the very nature of the subject itself forbids that full disclosure of the awful consequences of the vice in question*".¹⁴

For middle-and upper-class women the Evangelical Movement offered new fields of charitable endeavour in which acceptable feminine virtues could be displayed without the fear of compromising purity.¹⁵ The genesis of Woman's Mission can be seen in the development of all female organizations, run by women for the benefit of their own sex. Ladies set up and managed Female Friendly Societies, Lying-in Charities, Charity Schools, and libraries.¹⁶ Typical of such organizations was the Friendly Female Society, instituted in 1802, to help "one class that seems peculiarly entitled to the notice of the female heart — namely *poor aged women of good character*." In the description of this charity¹⁷ the organizers were very careful to show that kindness on behalf of such objects was not unbecoming to women because of their special knowledge of female problems and their nature which was characterised by tenderness "which the God of nature has implanted, and which it is the business of religion to direct and foster in the female bosom."

Mrs. Catherine Cappe, an indefatigable worker for the good of society as a whole, and her sex in particular, pointed out that philanthropic efforts on behalf of her own sex were the one activity which men could not disapprove of in women, for high moral attainments could not threaten his supposed mental or physical superiority.¹⁸ Mrs. Cappe also made the important point that philanthropic activity was a most suitable area for the single woman to exercise those feminine qualities fully employed by married women in the care of husband and children.¹⁹ She felt that if

¹² A HIGHMORE, *Philanthropia Metropolitana; a View of the Charitable Institutions established near London, Chiefly during the last twelve years* (London, 1822), p. 48.

¹³ *An address to the benevolent public on behalf of the London Female Penitentiary* (Shacklewell, 1807), p. 9.

¹⁴ LONDON FEMALE PENITENTIARY, *4th Annual Report*, 1811 (London, 1811).

¹⁵ M QUINLAN, *Victorian Prelude* (New York, 1941), chapter on "The Model Female."

¹⁶ F. PROCHOSKA, "Women in English Philanthropy, 1790-1830," *International Review of Social History*, XIX, 3 (1974): 426-45.

¹⁷ THE FEMALE FRIENDLY SOCIETY, *Report* (London, 1803).

¹⁸ Catherine CAPPE, *Observations on Charity Schools, Female Friendly Societies, and other subjects connected with the views of the Ladies Committee* (York, 1805).

¹⁹ Catherine CAPPE, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

single ladies combined in District Committees to engage in good works they would help to combat the widespread prejudice felt against them by men, and might even help to remove much of the derision and dislike felt against women in general.

Mrs. Cappe saw several areas where ladies could make themselves useful, but in all their primary aim should be the protection and elevation of their own sex, especially in the lower classes. Superintendence of the female wards of hospitals or of the workhouse she saw as particularly important, as both environments were particularly inimical to the preservation of female purity. Charity schools for girls were also an essential area of female concern because a committee of gentlemen could never, she asserted, have enough knowledge of the girls' clothing, employment, and general moral training, to be able to run such schools effectively. The setting up and managing of Female Friendly Societies was also an important occupation for middle-class ladies.²⁰

In harmony with these new ideas on the suitability of charitable work, ladies had an important but definitely subordinate role in the running of the London Female Penitentiary and the Guardian Society. A committee of twenty-four ladies, for example, assisted the (all male) officers of the Penitentiary and their minutes were kept by a female secretary. A matron was in charge of the day-to-day functioning of the institution.²¹ The Guardian Society was also run by men; a gentleman's committee interviewed all applicants for admission, disciplined those inmates who were refractory and gave Bible tracts and good advice to those about to leave,²² but a ladies' committee supervised the domestic arrangements and the work of the inmates.

Thus pure women, in the early years of the nineteenth century, could engage in active work for the improvement of their own sex providing they observed the limits of propriety laid down by men, and so long as their efforts enforced the rules of the feminine stereotype in lower-class women. With fallen women, their contact had to be limited and they did not engage in setting up institutions for them. Even this limited involvement in the management of penitentiaries did not go uncriticised. As one critic of the work of the Guardian Society suggested "A virtuous woman ought not only to be pure in body, but in mind: she should be kept perfectly ignorant of these things."²³ The writer, consistent with his view of women as weak and impressionable as blotting paper, felt that the Guar-

²⁰ Mrs. Cappe lived by her own prescription, running at least one Charity School and starting three Female Friendly Societies in the course of her life. *An Account of Two Charity Schools* (York, 1880); *Memoirs of the late Mrs. Catherine Cappe*, 3rd ed. (London, 1826). Anne SUMMERS, *Damned Whores and God's Police; the Colonization of Women in Australia* (Ringwood, Vic., 1975), described a similar development in Australia when Caroline Chisholm set up immigration programmes for respectable women, who were to be guided to their new life under feminine protection.

²¹ LONDON FEMALE PENITENTIARY, *Report of the Committee to the General Meeting* (1808).

²² GUARDIAN SOCIETY, *Eighth Report* (London, 1827).

²³ *An Address to the Guardian Society* (London, 1817), p. 11.

dian should abandon its efforts to reclaim hardened prostitutes and concentrate on combatting the seduction of young girls. The professionals were beyond reclamation.

I am convinced that that woman who has lost, not merely the delicacy, but the feelings of her sex so much, who has so far completely degraded herself as to wander the streets... can never again become fit to be a member of the society from whence she has been expelled... she can never recover that delicacy of feeling, that ignorance of vice, requisite to fit her for a companion to virtuous females.²⁴

During the 1830s and 1840s a new and more hopeful attitude towards prostitution became apparent, mostly as the result of the development of the science of penology. Much public consideration was given to the improvement of treatment of criminals, especially young women and children.²⁵ The writers of the period were moralists and medical men, and their work combined attempts at scientific description of the causes and milieu of prostitution with the propagation of some myths which would not have stood up under a really scientific examination. The stereotype of the prostitute changed from the brazen hussy to that of a young woman, who, if not completely innocent, was more than likely more sinned against than sinning. Attempts were made by both types of writers to relate the prevalence of prostitution to the poor wages paid in the only occupations open to women, and, in general, to make some connection between women's legal and political disadvantages and the problems of the prostitute.

The new attitude was reflected in a new type of rescue work: setting up small institutions on the principles of a "home" with the personal involvement of middle-class men. The work of William Gladstone in this field has been well documented as has the psychological stress which underlay much of his activity.²⁶ Less well known is Charles Dickens' close involvement in the day to day running of Urania Cottage, a home originally set up for fallen women with the intention of training them as domestic servants and paying their passage to Australia. Dickens remained interested and concerned with this institution for about twelve years, and it was the only charitable institution to which he gave his consistent attention over a prolonged period.²⁷ The institutions which embodied these new ideas were the homes run by the Rescue Society (Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children). Like Urania Cottage, the homes of the Society were small institutions run by matrons, in which girls were trained for domestic service. The actual work of changing behaviour was undertaken by gentlemen visitors who attempted to induce a conversion in each inmate as well as a change in outward

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

²⁵ M. MAY, "Innocence and Experience: The Evolution of the Concept of Juvenile Delinquency in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Victorian Studies*, XVIII (Dec. 1973): 7-30.

²⁶ R. DEACON, *The Private Life of Mr. Gladstone* (London, 1965); M.R.D. FOOR and H.C.B. MATHEW, eds., *The Gladstone Diaries*, vols. III and IV, 1840-54.

²⁷ S. Barbara KANNER, *Angela Burdett Coutts and Victorian Institutional Patronage, 1846-1858* (Ph. D. dissertation, U.C.L.A., 1972); Philip COLLINS, *Dickens and Crime* (Bloomington, Ind., 1968).

behaviour. Although changes in behaviour (the development of modesty and respectability, working consistently at some menial task) were aimed for, no woman was considered truly reformed unless she gave evidence of conversion. This relationship between middle-class men and lower-class girls was seen as a natural alliance against middle-class, middle-aged women by a commentator like A.J. Munby, the obscure barrister who became notorious upon the posthumous relation of his secret marriage to his servant, Hannah. As Leonore Davidoff comments, Munby believed that Hannah like all young servants saw "the Ladies as her natural enemies." Whether as the clients or the saviours of prostitutes men kept lower-class women from direct contact with middle-class women.²⁸

During the 1840s attempts were made to introduce legislation to prevent young women from becoming prostitutes. The Bishop of Exeter was persuaded by the Associate Institute to introduce the *Brothels Suppression Bill* in the House of Lords in 1844. The Institute had developed from a committee which had been set up in 1841 to enforce the existing laws against brothel keepers, procurers, and procuresses. James Beard Talbot, Secretary of the London Society for the Protection of Young Females, wrote a book to publicize the Institution's programme. He gives the conventional reasons for the causes of prostitution, adding to them "the existence of the immense number of houses who make a traffic of young girls of tender age, which the law, as it at present stands, takes no cognizance of."²⁹

Talbot hoped that the Bishop of Exeter's Bill, when passed, would suppress brothels, punish procurers, agents, and indeed anyone profiting from female prostitution. Parish authorities, he suggested, should be entrusted with the enforcement of the Act and with making a yearly return to the government of the number of brothels and prostitutes within their Parish.³⁰ Talbot's other solutions for the problem of prostitution reflect the ideas of the Associate Institute. He called upon virtuous women to take a leading role in the attempts both to stamp out the causes of prostitution and to reform prostitutes. As part of his preventive programme he asked respectable women to form themselves into societies for the purpose of working as missionaries to women who had already fallen. Asylums for prostitutes and for girls in danger of becoming such, were to be set up in every parish (supported by the parochial rates) and were to give women sound moral training.³¹ After a probationary period, Talbot suggested, the satisfactory inmates were to be transferred to already existing private institutions, to be trained for domestic service.³²

²⁸ Leonore DAVIDOFF, "Class and Gender in Victorian England: the diaries of Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Cullwick" (Paper delivered at the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, August 1978).

²⁹ RESCUE SOCIETY, *Annual Reports, 1869-1877; The Magdalens' Friend*.

³⁰ James Beard TALBOT, *The Miseries of Prostitution* (London, 1844).

³¹ If the Bill had become law the records resulting from its operation might have equalled the records of the Police des Moeurs in Paris.

³² J. B. TALBOT, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

The most interesting part of the work of the Associate Institute was the setting up of female auxiliaries for the all-male committees of the earlier organizations; the Auxiliaries were to engage in the work of encouraging virtue, while the men grappled with the more difficult task of putting down vice. The Female Institutes (as they were to be known) were to have male secretaries and to be staffed by mature, married women (young unmarried ladies it was felt, could have their purity compromised by becoming active in the Movement). The ladies would hold meetings for women, and hear the complaints from poor families about the misconduct of members of the upper classes against their relations. Like Mrs. Cappe's committees, the moral guidance of lower-class girls would be a particular task of the Female Institutes. "It is intended," concluded the Associate Institute, "to make this a movement of 'The Women of England' to be assisted by the opposite sex where their assistance may be necessary."

By 1846 the Associate Institute had auxiliaries in twenty-five towns and had produced four issues (it proved to be too expensive to continue) of a journal for women called *The Female's Friend* which was designed both for members of the Institute and for the girl in danger of falling. It was planned to contain expositions of the existing laws relating to women, their defects and suggested improvements, reports of the progress of the Associate Institute and rescue societies; and female literature, or notices and reviews of works written by either sex, with the object of elevating the character and condition of women.

The first issue of *The Female's Friend* began by wondering why "of all subjects most calculated to draw from woman's heart the deepest sympathy... it seems to be that on which, of all others, women in general feel the least."³³ The magazine continued by showing that woman's interest in her sisters should primarily be to ensure that they fulfilled their God-given Mission to Man. A review of a new book by the Reverend Benjamin Parsons, *The Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman*, made it clear that it was the power of female influence that made women's purity essential to the social order. Her influence depended entirely upon her status relative to man: "When female character is perfected by the correct knowledge, due cultivation, and proper direction of her various powers woman will exert an influence by which the whole mass of society will become renovated and purified." On the other hand, "If females, for want of proper education, are permitted to be ignorant or depraved, the majority of men will be ignorant and depraved also."³⁴ With this restricted view of female nature, it is not too surprising that the female biographies presented for the approbation of readers should be those of Hannah More and Elizabeth Fry, and that much of the four issues of the *Female's Friend* were taken up with hints to female servants and to mothers on their duties and proper submission.

Woman's power was not to be directly exercised in society through participation in work or in government, but indirectly through her influen-

³³ *The Female's Friend*, Jan. 1846, p. 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

ce on man. This was the theme not only of the *Female's Friend* but of numerous other works which began to appear in the 1830s and reached a flood tide in the following decade.³⁵ The concept of Woman's Mission was deliberately formulated as a counter to the feminist demands of some women of the 1830s.³⁶ Woman's Mission to Man depended upon her entire renunciation of any aspiration for herself in favour of the exercise of moral influence over man, for his good and for the ultimate good of society.

Woman is the real teacher and guide of man — the potent moulder of human destiny. The fate of the nation is in her hand. It depends on her whether peace and truth shall guide to prosperous reform; or reckless revolution stamp, with bloody characters, the annals of the next generation... Nor is her influence less potent when Youth is past. She is with man in the hour of man's weakness; to her he flies for assistance and sympathy in the season of suffering.³⁷

With such power over man, these writers considered woman should receive the best education available, for if uneducated, and consequently frivolous and unthinking, her influence could be fatally evil. Women who tried to act directly upon society, by leaving the domestic sphere and claiming political rights, were jeopardising their real power, represented by their influence on men. "There is indeed" wrote Mrs. John Sandford, "something unfeminine in independence. It is contrary to nature... it offends."³⁸ What then, was Woman's Mission? It was nothing less than to regenerate society through her influence on the (male) baby and on the grown man.

We claim for them (women) no less an office than that of instruments (under God) for the regeneration of the world — restorers of God's image in the human soul. Can any of the warmest advocates of the political rights of woman claim or assert for her a more exalted mission — a nobler destiny.³⁹

The exercise of Woman's Mission in no way threatened social order; woman's social subordination, pointed out the *North British Review*⁴⁰ should not be confused with moral inequality. But what could be the mission of those increasing numbers of women who were "redundant," those who could not marry because of the demographic imbalance between the sexes? The publication of the 1851 census figures revealed a frightening superabundance of marriageable women. The debaters concluded that woman's nature was such that maternal powers were natural even in the unmarried, and could be applied to society at large. The help of single women was much needed in many neglected areas of social life. Anna Jameson wrote an eloquent essay on this in 1855. *Sisters of Charity*

³⁵ For examples see Barbara FARQUAR, *Female Education* (1851); Sarah LEWIS, *Woman's Mission* (1839); Mrs. John SANDFORD, *Woman in her Social and Domestic Character* (1831).

³⁶ John KILHAM, *Tennyson and the Princess* (London, 1967), has an excellent account of the overtly feminist (and mostly Socialist) writers of the period.

³⁷ Barbara FARQUAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

³⁸ Mrs. John SANDFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁹ Sarah LEWIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁰ No. XXVIII (Feb. 1851) pp. 518, 532.

compares the accepted social role of single women in Catholic countries where religious sisterhoods of many kinds exist, with the waste of talents of their counterparts in Britain.

In this country... that what has been called... the "feminine element of society" considered as a power applicable in many ways to the amelioration of many social evils, has not only been neglected, but absolutely ignored by those who govern us. The woman cries out for the occasion and means to do well her appointed and permitted works, to perform worthily her share in the natural communion of labour.⁴¹

Those very qualities which were indisputably female were vitally needed by the workhouse child, the sick, and the socially disadvantaged of all kinds. To those without husband, children, or father to support, the call was clear.

By 1860s rescue work had proliferated so much that there was an institution in existence for every type of fallen woman. In the "Introductory Essay" to 1862 edition of Mayhew's *Life and Labour of the London Poor* an excellent annotated list of institutions appears.⁴² It was placed there by the publishers to inspire hope and confidence in those readers who might otherwise be too appalled by Mayhew's work. In this list the agencies were divided into the curative, the preservative, the reformative, and the punitive. Agencies that dealt with prostitution appeared under reformative, although, as the author pointed out, while agencies of this kind were reformative in their relation to persons, they had a preservative aspect when looked at in relation to society as a whole "for the reformation of every vicious man is a social boon, in as much as it removes one individual from a course of vice, and thus diminishes the aggregate of crime."⁴³

The author of this *Introductory Essay* was the Reverend William Tuckniss, editor of *The Magdalen's Friend*, a South London clergyman, and a fervent advocate of the "new rescue work."⁴⁴ Tuckniss condemned the old penitentiary system because it had not succeeded in persuading women to give up their way of life. He advocated the system of personal kindness and domestic training practiced in the homes of the Rescue Society. Since the 1840s respectable women had slowly been taking up this style of rescue work. *The Magdalen's Friend* reported numerous instances of ladies setting up small homes and becoming involved in their day-to-day management. Typical of these women was Mrs. Emma Shep-

⁴¹ Anna JAMESON, *Sisters of Charity* (London, 1855), pp. 15-16.

⁴² Henry MAYHEW, *Life and Labour of the London Poor*, Vol. I (London, 1862).

⁴³ MAYHEW, *op. cit.*, p. XXXVI.

⁴⁴ Tuckniss also lists a large number of preventive agencies whose work, he felt, helped to combat the factors in society which made women become prostitutes. He lists Ragged School Unions, the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Poor, and the many organisations for servants. For working women he mentioned the Needlewomen's Institution and the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women. Among the repressive and punitive agencies he lists the Associate Institution which continued to present annual Private Members Bills, trying to raise the age of consent. The newly founded Y.W.C.A. and the somewhat similar West London Home for Young Women are also mentioned. Forty agencies were located in the provinces. *The Magdalen's Friend*, Vol. 1.

pard of Frome. Mrs. Sheppard was a prominent citizen of this small Somerset town where she had founded a small rescue home, financed by herself. She was the author of several tracts, including *Sunshine in the Workhouse*, and an account of her own rescue work. It was Mrs. Sheppard who most vividly expressed how the "new rescue work" had made it possible for women to engage in face-to-face reclamation work, without endangering their own purity:

It is a woman's mission — a woman's hand in its gentle tenderness can alone reach those whom men have taught to distrust them; and I believe the more delicately nurtured, the purer, the more ignorant of vice the lady is who thus seeks them, the greater influence she would have over them.⁴⁵

As the fallen and unfallen women shared the same nature, the former could be restored to social and religious acceptance through kindness and careful retraining.

It must not be thought that the new workers in the rescue field minimized the original crime of fallen women or thought that social acceptance should come at once without a period of trial and punishment. Looking through *The Magdalen's Friend*⁴⁶ one sees the motive of kindness and criticism of the too strict regime of the older style penitentiaries mixed with attacks on those who were not strict enough, particularly Mr. Somerville and his congregation in Glasgow. Mr. Somerville, minister of a large church, did not demand protestations of conversion from the women who wished to leave prostitution, but guaranteed them work and lodgings if they gave up the trade. The members of the congregation paid for the board and lodgings of the girls and found them jobs, not only as servants but also in factories. The scheme enjoyed remarkable success, being much appreciated by the girls themselves.⁴⁷ *The Magdalen's Friend* was strongly critical of Somerville's efforts. "On merely sanitary principles" it editorialized,

we should view with suspicion the sudden and indiscriminate re-absorption of an unhealthy element into the social community and the attempt to demolish at one blow the stigma which society has hitherto affixed to this class of offenders... we care not how short the period of probation may be... but without this security the public have a right to demur at the unconditional re-admission of fallen women to their former status. The effect of such treatment merciful as it may seem, would be to disorganise society and to remove one of the most wholesome restraints against the commission of this evil.⁴⁸

The Magdalen's Friend was far from connecting the prevalence of prostitution with the economic and social disadvantages of women. It

⁴⁵ *The Magdalen's Friend*, No. 1 (1860), p. 93.

⁴⁶ Founded by William Tuckniss in 1860 "to promote every measure for the prevention, removal or alleviation of the 'great social evil', either by making known the various remedial channels and preventive associations, which lead to these results, or by bringing into communication, through the medium of these pages, all who are labouring to advance the cause." *The Magdalen's Friend* promised that "New plans and suggestions will be entertained, and the value of every remedial measure will be estimated, not by the voice of antiquity, but by its own inherent usefulness." 1 (April 1860), pp. 1-2. After the sudden death of the Rev. William Tuckniss in 1862 the magazine ceased.

⁴⁷ *The Magdalen's Friend*, No 5 (August 1860): 130-321.

⁴⁸ *The Magdalen's Friend*, No. 5 (August 1860): 134.

described the forces producing prostitutes under seven heads; the innate wickedness of human beings; agencies like procuresses and receiving houses; the enforced sharing of bedrooms amongst poor people. "utterly destructive in early years, of that modesty which is one of the guardians of virtue"; the neglect of moral education by parents; low wages; bad treatment of servants by masters and mistresses, particularly the pernicious example of mistresses in regard to dress; and finally, the law which sanctioned casinos and public houses and provided no adequate punishment for seduction.⁴⁹

A very fine example of the non-feminist woman's understanding of the essential sisterhood of all women is delineated in Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*,⁵⁰ a book which is described by Elaine Showalter in her seminal article on the author as being "the Holy Living and Holy Dying of Victorian Anglican Spinsterhood" (Craik did not marry until she was thirty-eight.⁵¹ Although Craik supported herself and members of her family by producing a stream of best-selling novels from the age of nineteen, she continued to believe that marriage was the natural destiny of women and that happiness could only come from submission to the male. *A Woman's Thoughts* was written when the author was thirty-two and it recommended an eminently sensible approach to the hard facts of a single woman's life. If marriage was an impossible goal for most women (which, given the midcentury demographic imbalance in Britain, it must reasonably be) then women's energies should be directed outwards towards the world's work. Even though the book contains many heavy-handed jokes about the nonsense of women's rights, the author also insisted that single women were not only the orphaned young lady, the genteel governess, or the esteemed authoress, but also the housemaid, the sempstress, and the prostitute. In her chapter on female servants she insists that the moral bonds of sisterhood should govern the relations between employers and domestics. Sisterhood means that ladies should allow their servants "followers" and not dismiss them without a character if they became pregnant. Craik also recommended that respectable women should devote themselves to finding jobs for the fallen and in every way welcoming them back into society.

Woman's mission assumed a feminist colouring when women who had been active in other radical causes and in the burgeoning women's movement organized themselves against the Contagious Diseases Acts. To examine the background of the women who for twenty years formed the core of the repeal movement⁵² is to find a diversity of experience

⁴⁹ *The Magdalen's Friend*, No. 4 (July 1860): 105-111. FEMALE MISSION TO THE FALLEN, *Reports*, 1860-67. Although the names of the Committee members are given in each Report, the names of the missionaries do not appear until 1867.

⁵⁰ Dinah Mulock CRAIK, *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (London, 1857).

⁵¹ Elaine SHOWALTER, "Dinah Mulock Craik and the tactics of sentiment: a case study in Victorian female authorship," *Feminist Studies*, II, 2-3 (1975).

⁵² Repealers often referred to themselves as the "New Abolitionists," seeing their struggle against the regulation of prostitution as a continuation of the old abolitionist cause — the abolition of black slavery. They also referred to themselves as Repealers.

within a range of protest and reform movements.⁵³ Elizabeth Wolstenholme, for example, had been headmistress of a girls' school in Manchester and an important witness before the Taunton Commission; Lydia Becker was founder of the Manchester Women's Suffrage Society and subsequently editor of *The Suffrage Journal*; Mary-Ann Estlin was a prominent anti-slavery worker; and Sarah Bunting (later Amos) was superintendent of the Working Women's College. All the women who were active in either the all-female Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts or in the other mixed sex associations for repeal had a long history of political activism. They brought to the repeal struggle an understanding of the connection between women's economic and social oppression and the prevalence of prostitution in contemporary society. It was Josephine Butler alone who combined a training in radical politics with long personal experience of rescue work on an individual basis. It is to this specific combination that we owe the excellence of her analysis of prostitution.

The connection between women's economic and social oppression in contemporary society and the prevalence of prostitution was clearly analysed for the first time in Josephine Butler's first published work, a pamphlet entitled *The Education and Employment of Women* (1868). The basis of her argument is the perception of shared female disadvantage and the necessity for female solidarity as the first step to any social change.

It will not be for themselves alone that enlightened and educated women will demand respect, they will claim it also for poor women, whom it is too often deemed a light matter to injure in the worst way, and even for the fallen, who through the voice of their happier sisters shall yet demand not only comparison, but the respect due to every human being, however clouded with misery and sin.⁵⁴

The prostitute in her extreme exploitation personified to feminist women the injustice and degradation to which all women were in reality subjected by nineteenth-century society. In *Education and Employment* and in her introduction to *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture* published in the following year, Josephine Butler made a detailed examination of the results that the expectation of women's economic dependency had upon their employment opportunities and earnings. Women's occupations, as she pointed out, were differentiated from men's not by their lightness or easiness but by their low pay. Examination of the 1861 census figures showed her that of the over three million women in full-time employment in Britain, 836,856 were wives and 487,575 were widows — living proof that marriage hardly provided women with secure means of subsistence. Improvement in the education of women teachers would lead not only to their increased competence and consequent happiness but to improved

⁵³ Patricia HOLLIS, *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England* (London, 1974). This book contains short studies of several pressure groups.

⁵⁴ *The Education and Employment of Women* (1868), p. 11; Frances Power COBBE, "The Final Cause of Woman," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, Josephine BUTLER, ed. (London, 1869), p. 6, describes the two conceptions of female character: "the final cause of the existence of Woman is the service she can do to man" or "the theory that Woman was created for an end proper to herself."

education for all women, and inevitably to improvement in their employment opportunities. The pamphlet continues by carefully dissecting the basic opposition between the two views of female nature which underlie the thinking of other advocates of improvement in women's educational opportunities. One side argued that improved education would make women better wives and mothers, but feared that real equality would produce "a masculine race of women." The other side was composed of women who had respect only for those of their sex who are "honorary men," interested only in making money, passing exams and getting on in the world. Josephine Butler strongly felt that women were not identical to men: she described as "a wise maternity" existed in all mature women, even the unmarried and childless, and this innate quality no amount of education could destroy. This quality of maternalism was desperately needed in nineteenth-century Britain to right the injustice and social dislocation caused by industrialisation. Women's solidarity could bridge the difference between classes in a way that male efforts at reconciliation or brotherhood could not do. Such "masculine women" as might exist were the result of the restriction and oppression to which they had been subjected, *not* the result of equality of opportunity.

The connection between prostitution and male determination to confine women to the domestic role was made clear by Josephine Butler in a letter she wrote to Frederick Harrison in 1868. Harrison was the leading English Comptist⁵⁵ and middle-class supporter of trade unions. He absolutely opposed the paid employment of any women, married or single. As Josephine Butler pointed out, prostitution was a direct result of such male insistence on women's domestic role, and, she added, working women found it easier to marry because their economic independence made them more attractive as partners than untrained and unemployable women. "So if you wish to increase marriage throw open employments to women," she concluded in the letter, "You increase marriage in two ways thus — first by diminishing prostitution, second by enabling women to win the esteem and hearts of men."⁵⁶

Feminism to Josephine Butler meant that women were human beings without ceasing to be women. She was more concerned with the evils affecting women than the other injustices of society because women's oppression had a worse effect upon the rest of society: in the long run the oppressors (men) would suffer more than the oppressed. The current oppression of women she ascribed to an historical circumstance: the fact that women had been left out when the lives of all other groups within

⁵⁵ Paul ADELMAN, *The Social and Political Ideas of Frederick Harrison in relation to English Thought and Politics, 1855-1886* (Ph.D. dissertation, London, 1968). The Comptists put women on a pedestal and worshipped them as "the soul of Society" while denying them any participation in social or political life. As Josephine Butler rightly pointed out, any sensible woman would prefer to have well paid employment in preference to being worshipped; the Comptists she personally knew "are in practice the most shallow and venial in their theories and treatment of women." In later life Mrs. Harrison became a prominent supporter of the Anti-Women's Suffrage League.

⁵⁶ Fawcett Library, *Josephine Butler Collection*, Josephine Butler to Frederick Harrison, 9 May 1868.

the population had been radically changed by industrialization. Economic survival in the mid-nineteenth century required education, training, and collective bargaining power. Women are denied these and lived still in the world of pre-industrial patriarchy; in Josephine Butler's words they were "stranded."⁵⁷

Why should the fallen woman, and particularly the prostitute, be the care of the feminist? Abolitionist women felt that however miserable certain classes of men were there was no analogy between them and the sufferings of such women, "... the *existence* of this class alone would have been enough to urge us who are happier to claim now — freedom and power to reach and deal with great social evils in their beginning and not only in a limited degree in their dire effects".⁵⁸ Woman's Mission to Woman at this point became the core and foundation stone of the women's movement to Abolitionist women.

To Josephine Butler, rescue work of the traditional kind was at best "the draining of a pool into which a vast tide is continually pouring"⁵⁹ She attacked the whole "decontaminating" ideology of the penitentiary, which isolated women from the rest of society. The women themselves, she reported, protested against their period of quarantine, which, they pointed out, was not demanded of men.⁶⁰ When asked to give a paper "on the Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes" at a Conference of Repeal Associations in 1870 she declared to the audience that she would have found it much easier, and more in her line, to read a paper "on the Reclaimability of Profligate Men" to an audience of two or three hundred prostitutes. Her speech presents, possibly for the first time, the views of prostitutes about their clients. It was their clients' *hypocrisy*, she said, which appalled the women; the fact that they lived the lives of outcasts while men went back to their families and to respectable positions in society. Men who reproached ladies for avoiding their fallen sisters should bear in mind, she said, that many women were driven back from such work by learning that their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons were clients of prostitutes. She continued by attacking the "labelling" process, which lumped all women together under the designation prostitute, once again reinforcing the idea of two classes of women divided from each other by a hard line:

I must remind you that among the poor — the classes dealt with by the Contagious Diseases Acts... the boundary line between the virtuous and the vicious is so gradually and imperceptibly shaded off, that there is no point at which it would be possible to affix a distinct name, or infallibly assign a class.⁶¹

There were, she maintained, as many variants of character among fallen women and prostitutes as there were among virtuous ones. The primary

⁵⁷ Josephine BUTLER, *Women's Work and Women's Culture* (1868), p. xv.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

⁶⁰ Josephine BUTLER, *The Hour Before the Dawn* (1876), p. 85.

⁶¹ *On the Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes* (1870), p. 6.

mistake was in thinking that *unchastity* was the one damning sin in women.

As well as opposing the labelling of prostitutes as a class and the decontaminating programmes of the penitentiaries, Josephine Butler very much disliked the type of individual rescue work carried on by men like Gladstone and the visitors of the Rescue Society. She felt very strongly that women alone could gain the confidence of their sisters. After all, men brought about their fall in the first place and it was a *male* view and *male*-dominated society which labelled them, denied them other work, and saw to it that they remained "fallen."

I recall the bitter complaint of one of these poor women a patient in the Chatham Lock Hospital. "It is *men, men, only men* from the first to the last that we have to do with. To please a man I did wrong at first, then I was flung about from man to man, then men police lay hands on us — by men we are examined, handled, doctored and messed on with. In the hospital it is a man again who makes prayers and reads the Bible for us. We are had up before magistrates who are men, and we never get out of the hands of men till we die" and as she spoke I thought "and it was a Parliament of men only made this law which treats you as an outlaw — men alone met in Committee on it. Men alone are the executives."⁶²

Lady visitors were forbidden in the Chatham Lock Hospital, and Josephine Butler thought that the men who ran it saw middle-class women as a subversive influence upon the inmates. The Contagious Diseases Acts had acted as a catalyst upon the consciousness of women aware and concerned about the position and problems of their sex. Woman's Mission to Women became a central point in the feminist campaign. It demanded "a constant, sustained, and well-governed indignation; for a just anger, as well as charity, is needful for the purification of society, as well as of the individual soul."

In 1873 a new dimension was added to the struggle against prostitution by the founding of the Social Purity Alliance. The National Society for the Promotion of Social Purity (later Social Purity Association and Social Purity Alliance) was founded in 1873 by Abolitionist workers, and proved to be a precursor of many similar purity associations. The S.P.A. pioneered a new approach to the task of changing sexual behaviour, and its programme attempted to make effective the wish so often expressed by those involved in Woman's Mission, that some work be done with men. "The object of the Society," as stated in its *Laws*, "is to promote the practical recognition of the principle that the Law of Purity is of universal obligation on all men and all women alike, and thereby to counteract the causes of prostitution."⁶³ The Alliance engaged in a sustained attack on the causes and motives which led to and supported prostitution. This gave them an almost universal sphere of operation. As the founders of the Society wrote, two basic enquiries had to be made before the object of the Alliance could be obtained:

⁶² "The Garrison Towns of Kent; Third Letter from Mrs. Butler," *The Shield* (1870): 79.

⁶³ NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL PURITY, *Laws of the Society* (1875).

First, what is there in our laws and institutions, in our social usages, in our system of education that tends directly or indirectly, by commission or omission, to develop or to tolerate mere animal passion in the place of human love? And secondly, when the sources of evil have been found, how can we direct against them the appropriate remedy, — legislative, social, educational, or personal?⁶⁴

The answering of these two questions was designed to proceed simultaneously through public work, mostly of an educational nature, and by the private indoctrination of young men, who were seen to be the prime target of the Alliance's efforts. The former work was to be done in the orthodox way by central and local committees, the latter by individual members. The Society particularly wished to involve men who had been the seducers of girls or the clients of prostitutes to engage in this private work as a form of reparation to society.

Prostitution was seen by the Society in its early days as a social ill, inextricably part of the general injustice to women enshrined in contemporary laws and mores. The woman was seen as a social victim — not as an individual failure. Such thinking is of course typical of Abolitionists. In its stated aim of hoping to concentrate on work with young men, the Society gradually moved away from this position towards the more common rescue approach.⁶⁵ A study of the membership list reveals the names of many students, university lecturers and school masters, including pioneers of sex education in the public schools like George Butler and his brothers C.G. and Arthur S. Butler. The executive committee consisted almost entirely of men and women already active in Repeal organisations. The work of the Alliance became particularly aimed at upper-class young men, especially undergraduates.⁶⁶ The long distance the Alliance had travelled by 1884 can be seen in an address made by the headmaster of Clifton College, the Reverend J.M. Wilson, to a meeting of university men held under the auspices of the Cambridge Association for Promotion of Purity of Life in 1884. A very different attitude towards women now prevailed among S.P.A. members. Wilson explained that he by no means disapproved of the social ostracism of fallen women; he wished only to see it extended to men. The only women who aroused his sympathy were innocent girls who were entrapped by the white slave trade: "There is no more splendid career in England," opined Mr. Wilson, "than saving these English girls." To the Purity worker fallen women were almost as non-human as they were to ardent regulationists.⁶⁷ It was

⁶⁴ NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL PURITY, *Annual Report* (1875), p. 11.

⁶⁵ Josephine Butler explained the reason for concentration on young men in a letter asking Mr. and Mrs. Clark to join the Alliance (Fawcett Library, *Josephine Butler Collection*, June 1876). Many young men, she explained, would not be interested in joining a repeal organisation with its specific aims, but needed to be supported in their individual efforts to lead a pure life.

⁶⁶ 1200 Cambridge undergraduates were active in the Alliance in 1881, *Sentinel*, July 1881.

⁶⁷ Many people who utterly condemned the ordinary prostitute became interested in combatting the white slave trade because girls caught up in it could more easily be seen as approximating to the stereotype of the innocent victim.

the purity of *men* which had become the main concern of the movement as the work of Jane Ellice Hopkins shows.

The work and writings of this most prolific apostle of social purity provide a striking contrast to that of the feminist Abolitionists. Although she was often ranked with Josephine Butler by both contemporaries and subsequent historians,⁶⁸ two more unlike women can scarcely be imagined. Described by her biographer as having "...no outward physical gifts to help her appeal; unmarried, never having even come closely into contact with children — this fragile dauntless woman talked to anxious or to indifferent mothers, to clever youths, to weary women toilers, to innocent and ignorant girls, or to thoughtful and experienced workers, and was at home at once..."⁶⁹ The two most influential figures in Ellice Hopkins' life were men: her father, the mathematician William Hopkins, and James Hinton, an ear specialist and philosopher whom she met in 1872. Hinton believed in the sacredness of suffering and saw the degradation of the fallen woman as necessary for the redemption of men.⁷⁰ Ellice Hopkins started her missionary work by preaching to navvies and she remained primarily interested in working with men. The women for whom she cared were the innocent only (she founded many Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls) and she remained hostile to prostitutes believing that they remained even when rescued, a contaminating influence in society, unless they had been subjected to the cleansing influence of the penitentiary.⁷¹ The unchaste woman, she felt, had qualitatively become something different from the chaste. She engaged in rescue work, not because she felt the women were themselves worth saving, but because they were "the worst seducers to sin" and lessening their number could not but increase male purity. To Ellice Hopkins the domestic ideal was the central reality for women, and she saw no connection between the prevalence of prostitution and women's social and political disabilities. "In the divine order of things, the man is head of the woman, the woman is the heart of the man," she wrote, "and whilst his heart is corrupt, whilst young men come into familiar contact with desecrated womanhood, I ask you, can they realise their own manhood?"⁷² Ellice Hopkins restated Woman's Mission to Man in a form acceptable to the later nineteenth century and integrated it into the Women's Movement, to the mainstream of which she firmly believed she belonged. She saw woman's true role as being that of guardian of the home and family, her chief task being the moulding and rearing of the future man. "To the women then," she wrote, "we must look for the solution of the problem of humanity."

⁶⁸ Her dates (1836-1904) closely parallel Josephine Butler's and the *D.N.B.* (Second Supp.) describes her work as preventive while Josephine Butler's was remedial.

⁶⁹ Rosa BARRETT, *Ellice Hopkins* (London, 1907), p. 104.

⁷⁰ Ellice HOPKINS, *The Life and Letters of James Hinton* (London, 1878), p. 354.

⁷¹ Ellice HOPKINS, *Work in Brighton: or Woman's Mission to Woman* (London, 1877).

⁷² Ellice Hopkins was absolutely opposed to working mothers and wanted state legislation to force them to stay at home. She was opposed to any provision of creches or child care facilities except for the children of widows, *Grave Moral Questions* (London, 1882), p. 42.

The White Cross Army⁷³ founded by Ellice Hopkins and Dr. Lightfoot, the Bishop of Durham, in 1883,⁷⁴ was the organizational expression of her ideas. The founding members of the Army were pit men and clerks, but it was designed to appeal to men of all classes. Branches could be independent, or attached to some existing guild or society. Although its first stated aim was to encourage chivalrous behaviour towards women, the main purpose of the White Cross was to encourage men to keep themselves pure by a mutual aid system. Respect for women was a necessary step in this, because Ellice Hopkins believed that when women were not placed on a pedestal, homosexual behaviour inevitably occurred among men. She cited fifth-century Athens as an example of this. White Cross became one of the most popular purity associations and by 1886 there were branches in all but two dioceses of the Church of England, and Army and Navy Associations. Subsequently it became an international movement.

Other organizations which resembled the White Cross Army were set up during what participants called "The Purity Crusade."⁷⁵ It was the discovery of the trade in British girls in 1880 which gave a new impetus to the movement and the campaign against white slavery which finally succeeded in gaining the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The furore created by the publication of W.T. Stead's articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette*⁷⁶ and his ensuing trial and imprisonment led to many meetings and demonstrations out of which came the largest, longest lived, and probably most successful purity organization, the National Vigilance Association.⁷⁷ The National Vigilance Association successfully combined preventive work with women and the type of repressive action carried on by the Society for the Suppression of Vice (which it eventually absorbed). It fulfilled much of the desire of purity workers for a repressive organization, and it was respectable in a way that the Repeal Campaign had never been; for example, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who had always refused to identify herself publicly with the Ladies National Association became an enthusiastic member of the National Vigilance Association Preventive Sub-Committee.⁷⁸ The other sub-committee of the National Preventive Association were Legal (of which Ellice Hopkins was a member), Organising, Parliamentary and Municipal, Registries, Finance, Literature, and the Sub-Committee for the Suppression of Foreign Traffic (of which Josephine Butler was a member). The National Vigilance Association took over the continuing campaign for the raising of the age of consent and many other central concerns of those who had been working on the

⁷³ Also known as the "League," "Movement," or "Fellowship."

⁷⁴ Ellice HOPKINS, *The White Cross Army* (London, n.d.).

⁷⁵ *The Purity Crusade, its Conflicts and Triumphs* (London, n.d.).

⁷⁶ Frederick WHYTE, *The Life of W.T. Stead* (London, 1925).

⁷⁷ The National Vigilance Association under the name of the British Vigilance Association was wound up only in 1972.

⁷⁸ Material on this Association comes from two books by William Alexander COOTE, lifelong Secretary of the National Vigilance Association, *A Romance of Philanthropy* (London, 1916), and *A Vision and Its Fulfillment, Being a History of the Origin and Work of the National Vigilance Association for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic* (London, 1910).

problem of prostitution earlier in the century: procuring for brothels and legislation against seduction. The work of the N.V.A. became more repressive towards the end of the 1880s, and attitudes towards prostitution tended to veer back to the anti-feminist. A paper was read to the conference of the national Vigilance Association in 1886 by Rachel Elizabeth Chapman. Her title was "Rescue Work, Old and New." The New rescue work as described by Miss Chapman sounds very like that advocated by *The Magdalen's Friend* twenty years earlier. Rescue work, the writer felt, had been revolutionized during the past twenty years because it had become part of the Social Purity Movement and was but a small fragment of the struggle for a higher and equal moral standard. For this reason Miss Chapman warned rescue workers against taking lightly "What, rightly considered, is perhaps the gravest and most grievous of all sins." She was a firm believer in decontamination when it was allied with kindness.

What was the feminist view of the Purity Movement, and in particular, of the repressive aspects of the work of the N.V.A.? To many women Abolitionists the transition from the Repeal campaign to the wider Purity struggle seems to have come as a natural progression, if one can judge from the large numbers who moved into work with the N.V.A. after Repeal was achieved.⁷⁹ To others the anti-feminist aspects of Vigilance work were clear, but they hoped to maintain unity in the movement by acting as agents of reconciliation. One of the latter was Josephine Butler. Just before the Repeal of the C.D. Acts in March 1886, she spoke to a large meeting in Exeter Hall. She was distressed by the split which had appeared between members of the movement who put absolute equality and absolute individual liberty above the authority of moral law, which she believed to be binding on everyone. Extreme individualists had turned upon their fellow workers who advocated external repressive measures against prostitution with the same indignation they turned on supporters of the C.D. Acts. To her, Social Purity was a vital component of the struggle against prostitution. "Let it be our part," she said "continually to promote every moral force possible, to strike at the roots of prostitution, to purify Society, and let us withhold our support from measures which merely touch the outside, and which even if perfectly equal as between men and women, would not succeed."⁸⁰

On the one hand, Josephine Butler publicly strove to maintain unity in the Movement, while in private she revealed her consciousness of wide differences between the philosophy of Abolitionism and the ideas of Social Purity. In a letter to Fanny Forsaith, Secretary of the British Branch of the Abolitionist Federation,⁸¹ she pointed out the essential difference

⁷⁹ See, for example, N.V.A., *Report of the Executive Committee* (1886), where the names of prominent women Abolitionists appear on the Council. Many local branches of Repeal Organisations became Vigilance Committees.

⁸⁰ Josephine BUTLER, *The Principles of the Abolitionists, an Address delivered at Exeter Hall, February 20, 1885* (London, 1885), p. 10.

⁸¹ Fawcett Library, *Josephine Butler Collection*, undated letter to Fanny Forsaith (probably 1892).

between the two. Purity work was basically educational work, while Abolitionism was a political and moral protest against an unjust institution. The two types of work had, she feared, become confused in the minds of members of the Movement. She wrote:

The Americans have so often spoken of our work and the Temperance work as twin movements, on the moral side they are; but they are very different in one essential element. The State never *created a slave class to minister to drunkards*. The State never deprived *women* of their civil liberties and natural rights in order that *men* might get drunk more comfortably.

Injustice and impurity were both evils within the fabric of society; but only injustice was embodied in unjust institutions, and therefore had to be fought with political weapons.

Purity was far more acceptable than equality in nineteenth-century Britain; the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886 came after the triumph of the National Vigilance Association and the drama of the Stead case, and owed far more to popular feeling against the men of the elite, than a change in attitude towards women. Respect for female chastity and an almost prurient interest in the preservation of virginity in young girls possibly became more widespread after the Purity campaign but there was certainly no increase in the acceptance of fallen women as sisters and fellow human beings by Purity workers or opponents of the white slave trade. As Josephine Butler wrote towards the end of her life:

In the midst of all that is now being done to promote a higher morality and to win men, our soldiers and others, to accept the higher standard, there is still, I think, a tendency to forget... our responsibility towards the women, the young girls of the so-called outcast class... They have been so welded into a compact class by human egotism that even the good and kind among men and women are apt to forget that they are no more criminal than others who are free, and to look upon them as a peculiarly degraded criminal class.⁸²

The final appearance of *Woman's Mission to Women*, purified of all its radical tendencies and crystallized within a tomb of respectability, was probably in a volume edited by Angela Burdett-Coutts for the Royal British Commission of the Chicago Exhibition of 1893. Entitled *Woman's Mission; a Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women by Eminent Writers*, it gave short accounts of the work of women like Agnes Johnson, the Temperance Reformer and Sailors Friend, Sarah Robinson the Soldiers Ditto and Ellice Hopkins..., all firm proponents of *Woman's Mission to Man*.⁸³ What explanation can one adduce for the ultimate failure of *Woman's Mission* as a feminist cause? A possible comparison with the American women's movement may be enlightening. W.L. O'Neill has suggested that the radical feminist element in the movement after the Civil War, was overwhelmed by the triumph of "social feminism." Social feminism argued that women deserved to parti-

⁸² Quoted in George W. and Lucy A. JOHNSON, *Josephine E. Butler; an autobiographical memoir* (Bristol, 1928), p. 211.

⁸³ *Woman's Mission; a Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women by Eminent Workers*, Arranged and edited with a preface and notes by Baroness BURDETT-COUTTS (London, 1893).

ciate in public life because of their moral and ethical superiority to men, while the radical feminists had demanded equal rights on the basis of their common humanity.⁸⁴ To justify their requests social feminists argued that society was an extension of the home, and women's work in the world only an enlargement of her maternal powers. This argument meshed only too well with the popularly accepted views of women's nature and function,⁸⁵ and its success as a justification of women's economic and social activity outside the home meant that the revolutionary stand of the women's movement (particularly the attack on marriage) was defeated and eventually abandoned by women.

Woman's mission was based upon the idea of a common female nature which underlay differences of class and status; but the largest number of women who accepted this premise also believed in the moral superiority of female nature. Until the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886 women who held feminist views worked with those who accepted the "wise maternalism" view of women's nature. After repeal, women working with prostitutes and fallen women did so under the aegis of social purity organisations and societies. Inevitably the feminist interpretation of Women's Mission to Women was abandoned and feminists concentrated their energies elsewhere, ultimately upon the struggle for the vote.

⁸⁴ William O'NEILL, *Everyone was Brave: a history of feminism in America* (New York, 1971).

⁸⁵ Leonore DAVIDOFF, Jean L'ESPÉRANCE and Howard NEWBY, "Landscape with Figures; Home and Community in English Society," in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Juliet MITCHELL and Ann OAKLEY, eds. (London, 1976).