

**Gender and the aristocracy of Dissent:
a comparative study of the beliefs, status and roles of women in Quaker
and Unitarian communities, 1770-1830, with particular reference to
Yorkshire**

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of the position of women in the small but important Dissenting communities of Quakerism and Unitarianism between 1770 and 1830. It demonstrates how the different but equally distinctive religious beliefs of the two denominations underpinned attitudes and practices relating to women which offered the potential for a greater degree of personal and intellectual development and individual autonomy than prevailed in society at large.

Part One explores the relationship between religion and ideology. For each denomination it shows how femininity was conceptualized, considers these ideas in relation to doctrines on masculinity, compares them to other gender discourses, and traces changes over time. Part Two investigates the practical implications of denominational affiliation through a regional study of the experiences of Quaker and Unitarian women in Yorkshire. It shows that, albeit in very different ways, the religious practices of both denominations permitted women to wield certain types of authority and influence not only alongside but also sometimes over men and other women, and offered access for some to superior forms of education. Scrutinizing their activities outside denominational boundaries in the burgeoning cross-denominational philanthropic organizations of the period reveals how for some women from both groups their sectarian heritage placed them in a strong position to undertake leading roles.

The comparative denominational focus of my study counters the conventional emphasis on evangelicalism to show how marginal but predominantly middle-class religious movements developed alternative gender ideologies and practices. It argues that the 'separate spheres' model of gender relations is inappropriate for analysing these women's experiences, as their denominational communities represented a discrete, mixed-sex sphere in which 'public', 'private' and 'domestic' spaces converged. Increasing exposure to evangelical cultural influences during the nineteenth century offered a widening sphere of action to Quaker and Unitarian women, but simultaneously encouraged a narrowing of denominational perspectives on femininity.

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Abbreviations

BIHR	Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York
BLUL	Brotherton Library, University of Leeds
BRL	Birmingham Reference Library
<i>BQ</i>	William C. Braithwaite, <i>The Beginnings of Quakerism</i> .
<i>DQB</i>	'Dictionary of Quaker Biography,' Friends House Library
DWL	Dr Williams's Library, London
EYARS	East Yorkshire Archive and Record Service, Beverley
FHL	Friends House Library, London
FRO	Family Record Office, London
HMC	Harris Manchester College, Oxford
<i>JFHS</i>	<i>Journal of the Friends' Historical Society</i>
<i>LPQ</i>	Rufus M. Jones, <i>Later Periods of Quakerism</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Monthly Repository</i>
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
QWD	Microfilm 'Quaker women's diaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'
SCA	Sheffield City Archives
<i>SPQ</i>	William C. Braithwaite, <i>The Second Period of Quakerism</i>
WYAS	West Yorkshire Archive Service (branch in brackets)
YCA	York City Archives

Introduction

'[The female] sex seems, by the constitution of its nature, to be more favourably disposed than ours to the feelings and offices of Religion.'

So observed William Wilberforce, the leading Anglican evangelical of the day, in his influential work of 1797, *A Practical View of the Prevailing System of Professed Christians ... Contrasted with Real Christianity*.¹ Wilberforce's proposition reflected a well-established and widely-held belief that religious inclination was an innate, even defining, female characteristic.² It was an opinion which patterns of formal religious observance seemed to confirm. As historians charting religious developments during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have demonstrated, both in general terms and in denominational contexts women appear to have been more likely than men to attend places of worship.³ The contemporary assumption that women's relatively higher level of religious activity stemmed from their greater inherent piety has, however, been subjected to critical scrutiny by historians concerned to explore the gendered nature of religious experience. Their investigations have shown that this belief represented just one strand in a mesh of sometimes contradictory attitudes which shaped the relationship between gender and religion. For instance, whilst women were eulogized by virtue of their supposedly superior capacity for spirituality, the subordination of women practised in society at large was perpetuated by religious groups and organisations. Women's engagements with and experiences of religion were thus often deeply complex, defying straightforward interpretation. A common theme to emerge from this scholarship is, that although women remained institutionally subordinate, religion potentially offered them a space (albeit a limited one) in which they might appropriate and exploit ideas about femininity in order to define and negotiate for themselves personal forms of expression and

¹William 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*, second ed. (London, 1797), p. 336.

²The belief in women's greater religious susceptibility was common currency from at least the seventeenth century onwards. See Anthony Fletcher, 'Beyond the Church: women's spiritual experiences at home and in the community,' *Church History*, 34 (1998), pp.187-203.

³David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s*, third ed. (London, 1995), pp. 25-6, pp. 128-9; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume II: the expansion of evangelical nonconformity* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 54-5; Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe, 1789-1989*, second ed. (Oxford, 1997), especially pp. 28-34.

spheres of activity in ways which could subtly challenge the established gender hierarchy.⁴

The opportunities open to women to engage in autonomous action through religion, and the ways in which they were able to do so, were heavily influenced by their individual denominational allegiance. In this thesis, I shall be using a comparative, denominationally focussed approach to investigate the gendered meanings of religious affiliation for women (and, although to a lesser degree, men) who belonged to the two small but important Dissenting communities of Quakerism and Unitarianism during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Adopting a comparative approach necessarily raises the question of likeness between the two denominations. Indisputably, Quakerism and Unitarianism were radically different from one another in terms of religious beliefs, practices and history, and there was much in the character of each that made it distinctive within English Protestantism. For both communities the period between 1770 and 1830 was one of transformation. The Society of Friends originated as a radical Protestant sect in the mid-seventeenth century, so that by the period under discussion here more than a century of history provided a source of reference and identity for its members. Since its beginnings the Society had espoused a mystical form of Christianity, stressing the direct, personal relationship between God and each individual believer as the heart of religion. The most striking aspect of Quaker mysticism was the belief that there existed 'that of God' in the heart of every individual woman and man, and that through this divine 'Inner Light' the will and teachings of God could be accessed and understood at first hand. As it was held that the divine will could be made known to anyone the Society had no ordained ministry, and any Friend experiencing inspiration was free to speak during worship. Towards the end of the seventeenth century Quakerism was profoundly influenced by the mystical tendency known as Quietism. In terms of religious practice, Quietism stressed that for inward communion with God to take place there must be stillness both within and without. This insistence on the need to refrain from all unnecessary activity which distracted the mind from its focus on God shaped not only the Society's internal character but also its relationship with the wider world, and it became an inward-looking, partly closed community. Friends' early missionary zeal gave way to concern for the

⁴Gail Malmgreen, *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (London, 1986); Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel (eds.), *Disciplines of Faith: studies in religion, politics and patriarchy* (London, 1987). For other examples of the ways in which women were able to exploit the notion of their superior religious nature in order to carve out new and important roles for themselves in society during the nineteenth century see F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1980); Alex Tyrrell, "'Women's Mission' and pressure group politics in Britain, 1825-60,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 63 (1980-1), pp. 194-240.

maintenance of faithfulness among existing members and their descendants through tightening of internal discipline and the introduction of birthright membership. It has been estimated that by the mid-eighteenth century eighty to ninety per cent of Friends were themselves the children of Quakers.⁵ Intercourse with those who were not Friends was discouraged in all areas of life, most strikingly exhibited in the prohibition against marriage outside the Society. Adherence to singular and rigid behavioural, linguistic and dress codes was demanded as essential to the preservation of religious purity, and served further to distinguish and separate Friends from wider society. Quakers' prominence in anti-slavery campaigns from the 1770s onwards, however, signalled a new willingness to work alongside Christians of other denominations. In addition, during the last years of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth the mystical basis of Quaker beliefs began to face a subtle but significant challenge when, in response to a series of episodes of allegedly 'rationalist' heresy among the membership, a small number of respected Friends began cautiously to promote elements of evangelicalism within the Society.⁶ It is difficult to know how widespread the acceptance of evangelical teaching was among the generality of Quakers, but within influential sections of the leadership at least, by the 1830s and 1840s the authority of the Scriptures was being emphasised above that of inward revelation.

In contrast to the established position which the Society of Friends occupied at the start of the period, Unitarianism was only beginning to emerge as a distinct denomination in the 1770s with the coalescence of several strands of Enlightenment rationalism which had been evolving within both Dissent and the Church during the previous century. It was, in the words of John Seed, 'a bold project to square Christian religion with contemporary scientific knowledge.'⁷ Rational Dissent's primary site of development was in the relatively liberal and accommodating English Presbyterian denomination, which also provided Unitarianism's main institutional base, although Independency and General Baptism also produced important figures of the early decades of Unitarianism. So too did Latitudinarian Anglicanism, and the decision in 1773 by the clergyman, Theophilus Lindsey, to leave the Church in order to open England's

⁵Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume I: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), p. 390.

⁶On the evolution of Quaker beliefs during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see *BQ*; *SPQ*; *LPQ*. On the controversies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the introduction of evangelicalism and enduring continuities with the older Quietist heritage see Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (London, 1970), pp. 6-28; *LPQ*, i, pp. 274-308.

⁷John Seed, 'The role of Unitarianism in the formation of liberal culture, 1775-1851: a social history,' University of Hull Phd (1981), p. 1.

first avowedly Unitarian chapel is recognised as marking the denomination's official establishment.⁸ Committed to the practice of free religious enquiry, Unitarianism comprehended a broad cross-section of opinion whose adherents were loosely bound by their rejection of the doctrines of the Trinity, Original Sin, and the Atonement, devotion to the cause of religious freedom, and often political radicalism. However, particularly in the wake of the anti-Radical backlash of the 1790s, some Unitarians sought to bring increased organisation to the movement through such media as denominational associations and periodicals. The 1830s marked a turning point for Unitarianism in both intra- and inter-denominational terms. The movement itself split. One branch followed the ultra-rationalist W. J. Fox and parted from the mainstream church. Within the mainstream, the influential work of James Martineau set Unitarianism on a course which drew it away from some aspects of its eighteenth-century heritage. He rejected the purely rational, and emphasised instead the intuitive base of religious belief. At the same time, the generally unfavourable attitude of the orthodox dissenting churches towards Unitarianism hardened. Under the influence of evangelicalism, they increasingly, 'regarded Unitarians with distaste as a species of infidel within the professing church.' For example, in 1819 Unitarian Sunday Schools were excluded from the non-denominational Sunday School Association,⁹ and in 1837 Unitarians were forced to withdraw from their historic alliance with the Baptists and Independents in the General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers.¹⁰ Indeed, the opprobrium with which Unitarians were viewed by orthodox Christians on account of their heretical beliefs was perhaps the most significant unifying influence on the Unitarian movement. Although not bound to do so by the same kind of strict laws which governed Friends, they were effectively forced to look amongst themselves for friendship, courtship and business contacts. As John Seed observes, during the first half of the nineteenth century, 'To be a Unitarian was not just an individual and private avocation.

⁸Dating the beginning of the Unitarian denomination to Lindsey's secession is supported by, for example, Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: church, chapel and social change, 1740-1914* (Oxford, 1973), p. 41. For studies on aspects of the development and heritage of Unitarianism see Knud Haakonsen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: rational dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996); Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Toleration and truth,' *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 1 (1982), pp. 3-32; Mark Philp, 'Rational religion and political radicalism in the 1790s,' *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 4 (1985), pp. 35-46; C. G. Bolam *et al* (eds.), *The English Presbyterians: from Elizabethan Puritanism to modern Unitarianism* (London, 1968), especially H. L. Short, 'Presbyterians under a new name,' pp. 219-286; R. K. Webb, 'The Unitarian background,' in Barbara Smith (ed), *Truth, Liberty and Religion: essays celebrating 200 years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 1-30; Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1977); Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: studies in the transmission, development and circumstances of English liberal thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the war with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, 1959), especially pp. 310-377.

⁹Seed, 'Unitarianism in the formation of liberal culture,' p. 355.

¹⁰Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 100.

It was a shared commitment, an affirmation of one's loyalty ... to an extended family network and family tradition.¹¹

Alongside their fundamental differences, however, some elements of similarity are apparent between the Society of Friends and Unitarianism which point to the importance of exploring their understanding of the status and roles of women and to the potential value of doing so in a comparative way. In concentrating on these two denominations this study addresses issues raised by several strands of existing gender historiography. Formative work seeking to illustrate the central role played by gender in the formation of middle-class culture and ideology, revisionist gender history of the past decade, and the history of the nineteenth-century women's rights movement all suggest that the study of these two groups might shed important light on the ways in which ideas and practices shaping gender relations varied between particular denominational settings.

Both Quakerism and Unitarianism were numerically small churches, and during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they shared an experience of declining membership which contrasted sharply with the growth being enjoyed by other dissenting denominations. According to the 1851 religious census Quaker meeting houses held a larger number of empty seats than any other places of worship in England and Wales, followed by Unitarian chapels. The Society of Friends, which in 1680 had an estimated 55,000 followers had just 19,800 by 1800 and forty years later that figure had fallen further to 16,277.¹² Mapping the fortunes of Unitarianism during this period poses greater problems because of the way in which the denomination was emerging, not through the gathering of converts but with the uneven metamorphosis of existing congregations so that the distinction between Presbyterian and Unitarian remained blurred. Presbyterianism had been in decline throughout the eighteenth century, with its number of chapels falling from 687 in 1718 to 200 in 1800. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century most of these remaining congregations had undergone the transition to Unitarianism, often alienating some members in the process, and the Unitarian movement showed little capacity for further expansion. In 1851 there were around 55,000

¹¹John Seed, 'Theologies of power: Unitarianism and the social relations of religious discourse, 1800-1850,' in R. J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-century Towns* (Leicester, 1986), pp. 107-156. It was, of course, the case that in a sense all the dissenting churches occupied marginal positions in relation to the conformist mainstream of religion and society. Combined with their individual peculiarities, this orientation gave each denomination inward-looking tendencies, a key manifestation of which was the widespread practice of endogamous marriage. This practice was especially evident at local and regional levels, but at a national level it is possible to track different strands of Protestant Dissent present within widespread family networks. See Clyde A. Binfield, 'Congregationalism's Baptist grandmothers and Methodist great-aunts: the place of family in a felt religion,' *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 2 (1978), pp. 2-9.

¹²Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 40-1.

Unitarian worshippers occupying 229 chapels.¹³ Geographically, the strongholds, if such they can be called, of the two denominations were located in broadly the same areas: Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire in the North; the Midlands; the South West. In terms of social status, both drew the majority of their members from among the middle classes. Certainly, they did have poorer adherents, not only within their mainstream congregations but also in the loosely-related hybrid groups whose memberships were almost exclusively working-class, such as the Quaker Methodists of Warrington and the Unitarian Baptists of York. More typical, though, were families of small-scale merchants, manufacturers and craftsmen, alongside a disproportionately high number of those from the business and commercial classes. The Society of Friends especially had a significant number of professional men, mainly doctors, in its ranks.¹⁴ Collectively, Quakerism and Unitarianism have been labelled ‘the aristocracy of Dissent’ on account of their overwhelmingly middle-class following.¹⁵ Yet there are significant problems with seeking to understand either of these denominations in terms of the arguments about the relationship between religion, gender and class set out by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall in their groundbreaking and influential work *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850*.

Davidoff and Hall seek to reconstruct the ‘ideologies, institutions and practices’ of the middle class during the period which they identify as that of its genesis. At the heart of their work lies the concern to recapture the necessarily gendered nature of the ways in which ‘middle-classness’ was understood and experienced by men and women.¹⁶ They argue that religion, and specifically the tenets and values of contemporary evangelicalism, played a central role in shaping the construction of so-called middle-class gender ideology.¹⁷ Often newly rich, middle-class people were anxious to avoid the taint of identification with the vulgarity of those below them, yet lacked the traditional claims to power and authority possessed by the gentry and aristocracy. A system of values and practices had to be formulated which would affirm and maintain their claims to respectability and the right to play a leading role in society. Religiosity, and rigidly constructed concomitant codes of domestic morality, became the

¹³Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 41; Seed, ‘Theologies of power,’ pp. 114-7.

¹⁴Watts, *The Dissenters II*, pp. 314-6.

¹⁵Douglas C. Stange, *English Unitarians Against American Slavery, 1833-65* (Canbury, 1984), p. 29.

¹⁶Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987), especially pp. 13-35.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, especially pp. 107-116. See also Catherine Hall, ‘The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology,’ in *idem.*, *White, Male and Middle Class: explorations in feminism and history* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 75-93.

measures of worth through which these claims were articulated. Initially, they were attracted to the possibilities offered by the didactic writings of Anglican evangelical theorists of the 1790s like Hannah More, William Wilberforce and Thomas Gisborne, and during subsequent decades professing fidelity to the principles of 'serious' Christianity became entrenched as a *sine qua non* of middle-class identity. By the 1830s and 1840s, 'adherence to evangelical Protestant forms had become an accepted part of respectability.'¹⁸ Fundamental to this middle-class ideology, Davidoff and Hall assert, was the definition of 'separate spheres' of male and female activity. The traditional view that the natures and status and hence the proper roles of women and men were intrinsically different took on particular meaning in the context of the developing middle class. Growing affluence made it possible to separate homes from places of work, thereby divorcing economic and domestic activities. Men were to bear full responsibility for making financial provision for their families, of which they were the public face. Meanwhile women, characterized by qualities such as piety, humility, gentleness and passivity had their primary - ideally only - sphere of action in the home. Realising this model of gender organisation within the family became an increasingly important emblem of class status.

But, Davidoff and Hall emphasise, even as they were divided in theory, these separate male/public and female/private spheres were inextricably linked in practice. Not only could women's financial input into the family enterprise be crucial for its survival, but also the functions of the household (traditionally neglected from studies of the circuit of production by its classification as 'private') was vital to the expansion of industrial capitalism on which middle-class survival depended. The domestic labour of women in the form of reproduction, nurture and consumption was central to the stimulation of consumer demand. Furthermore, women were charged with creating the home as a haven from what was portrayed as the morally contaminating influence of the wider world. There, children would be instilled with middle-class values. Men, meanwhile, would both be provided with the material necessities and comforts to enable them to fulfil their financial obligations, and, in the intercourse of domestic life, experience the refining and edifying influence of female company which would stimulate them to the exercise of greater morality in the public sphere. The home was thus elevated to become the seat of middle-class virtue.

Family Fortunes made a major contribution to the field of gender history. In placing gender at the centre of their analysis of class formation, and in examining the experiences of men as well as women, Davidoff and Hall 'succeeded in bringing gender to the forefront of

¹⁸*Family Fortunes*, p. 76.

mainstream social history.¹⁹ However, in the years since its publication, both the conclusions and the approach of its authors have been subjected to constructive criticism from historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on a number of counts. These revisionist reflections point the way to a more helpful method for seeking to unravel the meaning of gender in Quaker and Unitarian communities.

Amanda Vickery in particular has argued for the need to break away from analytical reliance on the great shibboleths traditionally accepted as fundamental to the study of women's history: that the rise of industrial capitalism caused the gendered separation of the spheres among the newly-forged middle class, as women were denied access to the workplace and other 'public' spaces and retreated into confining domesticity.²⁰ Vickery contends that there are serious historiographical problems which render the perceived link between the rise of capitalism and the triumph of 'separate spheres' gender ideology extremely problematic.²¹ In addition, she warns that too often historians have treated prescriptive literature about female behaviour as if it were in fact descriptive. When research is actually conducted into women's personal experiences, the sheer diversity which this discloses fundamentally undermines the notion that their lives were directed by conformity to the values of a dominant 'gender ideology.' She urges research which pays more attention to women's own manuscripts, which provides case studies of their lives, and which both identifies and demonstrates the impact of discourses and debates about gender status and roles in society alternative to those of 'domestic ideology' and 'separate spheres.'²² In her own recent study of women from genteel families in eighteenth-century Lancashire and Yorkshire, Vickery rejects the analytical framework offered by the 'separate spheres' model on the grounds that it had 'little resonance' in women's everyday lives, where, 'the household and family were not the limits of an elite woman's horizon. Nor was the house in any simple sense a private domestic sphere.'²³ This insistence

¹⁹Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-century England: roles, responsibilities and representations* (London, 1997), p. 19.

²⁰Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history,' *The Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 383-414; *idem.*, *The Gentleman's Daughter: women's lives in Georgian England* (London, 1998), especially 'Introduction,' pp. 1-12.

²¹Reviewing the studies which have advanced and established as received wisdom the notion that capitalism led to a drastic reduction in women's economic opportunities and their consequent confinement to the domestic realm, from Alice Clark's 1919 work on early modern women to *Family Fortunes*, Vickery observes, 'if the literature is read as a whole, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the spheres definitely separated and the new domestic woman was born in virtually every century since the end of the Middle Ages.' *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

²²Vickery, 'Golden Age to separate spheres?,' especially pp. 413-4.

²³*The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 9-10.

that the notion of a distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres along gender lines should not be uncritically accepted, but rather that the way(s) in which the terms 'public' and 'private' were used and understood by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century people themselves need to be heeded, is born out by research into the applications of the two terms during the period. Both 'public' and 'private' were highly unstable categories, each with many and varied possible meanings which could shift over time and space and which were not necessarily associated exclusively with the activities of men or women.²⁴

The concerns expressed by Vickery are echoed by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus in their editorial introduction to a wide-ranging collection of essays which explore in detail particular aspects of gender representations and roles in the eighteenth century. They too argue that the search for an over-arching conceptual framework through which to explain the operation of gender in society has ignored or obscured the complexities and richness of women's and men's lives, thereby distorting our understanding of the multiple ways in which the dynamic of gender has operated in the past. Historians must, they urge:

become more aware and accepting of the sharp contradictions and infinite variations of women's and men's experiences in pre-industrial societies. ... Differences imposed by region, custom, social status, occupation, religion or ethnicity, and by irregularities in the rate of technological change, urbanization and commercialization all complicate attempts to create meaningful generalizations.²⁵

It is as a contribution towards the quest for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which gender relations were conceptualized and experienced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the present study, which addresses the variable of denominational affiliation, is envisaged.

As I indicated above, Davidoff and Hall argue that the defining religious tendency among the middle class, and that which underpinned its doctrines on masculinity and femininity, was evangelicalism. Undoubtedly, evangelicalism was the dominant current in English religion during the period in question, and several studies have shown how as such it

²⁴Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender and the public/private distinction in the eighteenth century: some questions about evidence and analytical procedure,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1995), pp. 97-109; John Brewer, 'This, that and the other: public, social and private in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,' in Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (eds.), *Shifting the Boundaries: transformations of the languages of public and private in the eighteenth centuries* (Exeter, 1995), pp. 3-33. Leonore Davidoff urges that grasping the ways in which 'public' and 'private' have been employed by individuals is crucial to understanding the emergence of feminist consciousness and activism among women during the nineteenth century. See 'Regarding some "Old Husbands' Tales": public and private in feminist history,' in *Worlds Between: historical perspectives on gender and class* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 227-276.

²⁵Barker and Chalus (eds), *Gender in Eighteenth-century England*, p. 24.

played an influential part in shaping numerous aspects of contemporary society. Strictly speaking, evangelicalism simply refers to the religion of the Gospels, but during the eighteenth century it also assumed a more narrowly doctrinal meaning. Its adherents held that the Bible, literally interpreted, contained all religious truth. They asserted that humankind was innately sinful and thus sundered from God, and that individuals could be redeemed from this fallen state only through conversion of the heart to acknowledge their own worthlessness, placing complete faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ and promising obedience to the will of God. True inward conversion would invariably have outward manifestations in a life reformed to breathe a spirit of holiness, evidenced through the performance of good works and zeal to spread the gospel to the unconverted. Originating in the 1730s in the Methodist revivals in the Church of England, by the 1790s evangelicalism was infusing both Church and Dissent with renewed spiritual vigour. Whilst in numerical terms Methodism remained the most significant expression of evangelicalism, it was the emergence during the 1790s of a revival movement which this time remained within the Anglican fold which secured evangelicalism's social and political importance, drawing to it a substantial following from among the middle and upper ranks which it had hitherto lacked. Among the Dissenting churches, Independents and both General and Particular Baptists largely metamorphosed into evangelical denominations and as popular revival movements they, like Methodism, underwent rapid expansion.²⁶ Nevertheless, it seems problematic to suggest that evangelicalism had a pervasive influence on gender attitudes and practices throughout the middle classes.

A number of these problems are summed up by Amanda Vickery, who observes,

the extent to which evangelicalism was an exclusively middle-class project is unclear: the Clapham sect themselves hailed from the lesser gentry, while the appeal of methodism was obviously felt far down the social hierarchy. [And] it would be a mistake to see evangelical enthusiasm thriving in every middle-class home, just because the history of the tepid, the backsliding and the utterly indifferent nineteenth-century household remains to be written.²⁷

It is not only among the undocumented apathetic, though, that evidence can be found of a non-evangelical, middle-class perspective. A tension within Davidoff and Hall's treatment of religion in their reconstruction of 'middle-class gender ideology', and that which forms the

²⁶For an outline of the key doctrines of eighteenth-century evangelicalism see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, ch. 1. See also: Gilbert, *Religion and Society*; Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: the Evangelical impact on the Victorians* (London, 1976); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988).

²⁷Vickery, 'Golden Age to separate spheres?', p. 398.

point of departure for this study, is their use of many examples from Quaker and Unitarian families to illustrate apparently quintessential middle-class experience. Whilst the possible consequences for women of differences in denominational orientation are briefly considered in *Family Fortunes*, the potential importance of these is de-emphasised in favour of stress on the overall influence of evangelically-inspired gender doctrine.²⁸ Yet the disproportionately high socio-economic status noted above which many Friends and Unitarians enjoyed did not go hand in hand with adherence to the tenets and values of evangelicalism. The Quietist mysticism of the former and the rationalism of the latter made these two denominations resistant to the adoption of evangelical beliefs. Of course, the powerful evangelical current present within Quakerism after about 1830 had its roots in the preceding three decades, but neither the Society of Friends nor Unitarianism can be characterised as an evangelical denomination during the period with which the present study is concerned. Indeed, historians of religion seeking to demonstrate the marginality of these two groups during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have tended to do so by stressing their relative distance from the prevailing evangelicalism of the period. Alan Gilbert classifies them collectively as 'Old Dissent', those strands in the dissenting tradition whose values and orientation were continuous with older movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which were not swept along on the tide of the Evangelical Revival.²⁹ Similarly Michael Watts writes that:

Not all Dissenters were Evangelicals. By the late eighteenth century many Presbyterians ... had rejected the Trinity in favour of belief in the unity of God, and were seeking to apply rational criteria to traditional Christian teaching. ... A substantial number of Quakers also rejected Evangelicalism³⁰

In formulations which underline the complications which Quakerism and Unitarianism introduce into the notion that a necessary link existed between middle-class status and adherence to evangelical codes, both Gilbert and Bebbington explicitly attribute the disproportionately high socio-economic status of these denominations' membership and their lack of popular appeal to their very tendency to remain aloof from evangelicalism. The latter, for example, observes that some congregations were almost exclusively middle-class in

²⁸Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, especially pp. 130-40.

²⁹Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 40.

³⁰Watts, *The Dissenters, II*, pp. 2-3. See also Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: studies in English nonconformity, 1780-1920* (London, 1977).

composition, especially among ‘non-evangelical Unitarians and only partly evangelical Quakers.’³¹ In addition, several studies have shown that, for reasons rooted in their theologically marginal, internally cohesive, and socially exclusive identities both Quakerism and Unitarianism made significant and distinctive economic, political, cultural and educational contributions to the wider, multi-layered, middle-class world.³²

If evangelicalism was not a dominant factor shaping either Quaker or Unitarian beliefs, it seems untenable to suggest that it was the major force moulding their views about gender relations. The starting point for the search to uncover the meaning of gender in Quakerism and Unitarianism must be the characteristic traditions, beliefs, values and practices of the denominations themselves.³³

A further hint that distinctive and potentially significant ideas and practices surrounding gender prevailed within Quakerism and Unitarianism is provided by the historiography of the Victorian women’s movement. This scholarship has consistently highlighted the disproportionately important part which women, and for that matter men, from the two denominations played in Victorian feminism. In 1928, Ray Strachey noted that between 1830 and 1850 many of those who were expressing concern to reform the position of women in society,

came from among the new radicals, and in particular from the Quaker and Unitarian families [into which] it was not such a great misfortune to be born a woman ... you would be allowed and expected to be educated and intelligent, and you would be considered an equal in family life.³⁴

More recently, Philippa Levine too has pointed to the striking contribution to feminist ventures made by campaigners from these milieus. In her prosopographical study of 194 leading

³¹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 110.

³²On Quakers see James Walvin, *The Quakers: money and morals* (London, 1997); Sheila Wright, *Friends in York: the dynamics of Quaker revival, 1780-1860* (Keele, 1995); David H. Pratt, *English Quakers in the First Industrial Revolution: a study of the Quaker community in four industrial counties - Lancashire, York, Warwick and Gloucester, 1750-1830* (London, 1985); Arthur Raistrick, *Quakers in Science and Industry: being an account of the Quaker contribution to science and industry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Newton Abbot, 1968). On Unitarians see Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion*; Seed, ‘The formation of liberal culture,’; *idem.*, ‘Gentlemen Dissenters: the social and political meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 1780s,’ *Historical Journal*, 28, no. 2 (1985), pp. 299-325; David Wykes, ‘Sons and subscribers: lay support and the college, 1785-1840,’ in Smith (ed.) *Truth, Liberty and Religion*, pp. 31-77.

³³It should be acknowledged that John Seed concluded in his thesis that the Unitarian evidence pointed to the existence of influential discourses of appropriate middle-class behaviour alternative to those suggested by the historiographical emphasis on the impact evangelicalism. ‘The formation of liberal culture,’ pp. 366-7.

³⁴Ray Strachey, *The Cause: a short history of the women’s movement in Great Britain* (1928, reprinted London, 1979), p. 44.

Victorian activists, Levine found that twenty per cent had links with 'the small but active communities of Quakerism and Unitarianism, denominations known for their relative radicalism and interest in social conditions and welfare.'³⁵ The conspicuous participation of those from Quaker and Unitarian backgrounds in specific feminist campaigns has also been noted. For example, in the agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts they were well-represented at both national and local levels.³⁶ Clare Midgley, in her major study of women's involvement in anti-slavery agitation from the late eighteenth century onwards, traces a direct line of descent from early abolitionism through anti-Corn Law and Chartist activism to the Ladies National Association. Crucial in linking these movements into one heritage were 'The networks of Quaker and Unitarian families, denominations which provided the leadership of both anti-slavery and feminism.'³⁷

The remarkable level of feminist awareness apparent among Quakers and Unitarians points to the importance of seeming to map out the gender heritages of the two denominations during the formative period of modern feminism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A number of studies have been carried out to date which explore various aspects of these heritages, some with a direct view to tracing the roots of subsequent feminist development, and Unitarianism has been somewhat better served than Quakerism. The works of two historians of Unitarianism in particular have been illuminating. Ruth Watts focusses primarily on the unconventional stance which Unitarians adopted in favour of women's education from the late eighteenth century onwards to argue that, from this innovative base,

³⁵Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: private roles and public commitment* (Oxford, 1990), p. 32.

³⁶Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (London, 1985), p. 315.

³⁷Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: the British campaigns, 1780-1870* (London, 1992), p. 174. The small number of British women anti-slavery activists who went on to adopt a radical abolitionist stance and feminist position have overwhelmingly been identified as coming from Quaker and Unitarian traditions. See *ibid.* and Louis Billington and Rosamund Billington, "'A burning zeal for righteousness": women in the British anti-slavery movement, 1820-1860,' in Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different*, pp. 82-111. Despite the acknowledgement of the two denominations' importance, as yet only a very few studies have been undertaken aimed specifically at analysing the nature of Quaker and Unitarian Victorian feminism from their sectarian perspectives. On Quakerism see Sandra Stanley Holton: 'From anti-slavery to suffrage militancy: the Bright circle, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the British women's movement,' in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds.), *Suffrage and Beyond: international feminist perspectives* (New York, 1994), pp. 213-233; *idem.*, 'Offices and services: women's pursuit of sexual equality within the Society of Friends, 1873-1907,' *Quaker Studies*, 2 (1997), pp. 1-29. On Unitarianism see, Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: radical unitarians and the emergence of the women's rights movement, 1831-51* (London, 1995); Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London, 1998) especially pp. 198-213; Jane Rendall, 'Friendship and politics: Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-91) and Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829-1925),' in Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (eds.), *Sexuality and Subordination: interdisciplinary studies of gender in the nineteenth century*, (London, 1989), pp. 136-70; Helen Plant, "'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus": aspects of Unitarianism and feminism in Birmingham c. 1869-1893,' *Women's History Review* (forthcoming in June 2000).

conventional ideas about the balance of power in gender relations were challenged and renegotiated. However, Watts also stresses how this radical outlook could be compromised in practice. The quest by Unitarian men to achieve 'gentleman' status, and occupy the positions of leadership in society to which their wealth and education seemed to entitle them, inhibited commitment to the full development of equal opportunities for women.³⁸ In her study of the central part played by Unitarianism in fostering the early Victorian feminist movement Kathryn Gleadle contends that the existence of this contradiction between gender theory and practice makes it impossible to suggest that there was a straightforward link between a progressive religious and political outlook on the one hand and a concern to secure women's rights on the other. Rather, it was the experience of living with this tension which matured into feminist activism among Unitarian women:

The antinomies of Unitarian gender relations lie at the heart of the relationship between Unitarianism and feminism. Indeed, a vital catalyst in the formation of a feminist awareness was that the expectations of personal fulfilment which the Unitarian movement encouraged in women were not met.³⁹

Gleadle convincingly argues that the truly feminist strand within the Unitarian movement of the 1830s and 1840s, and that on which her work primarily focusses, was to be found in the radical reforming coterie of both women and men whom she terms the 'radical unitarians', centred on William Johnson Fox's South Place Chapel. They pursued a thoroughgoing feminist agenda, and their outspoken feminism was a major reason behind their break from the main Unitarian body. In terms of both ideology and personnel the radical unitarians provided a solid basis for the emergence of the national women's rights campaigns of subsequent decades.⁴⁰

Women Friends occupied a position within English Christianity which was unique for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in that they belonged to a predominantly

³⁸Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians*. See also *idem*: 'The Unitarian contribution to the development of female education, 1790-1850,' *Journal of Education*, 9 (1980), pp. 273-86; 'Knowledge is power: Unitarians, gender and education in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,' *Gender and Education*, 1 (1989), pp. 35-50; 'The Unitarian contribution to education in England from the late eighteenth century to 1853,' University of Leicester Phd (1989).

³⁹Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, p. 27.

⁴⁰*Ibid*, especially pp. 171-89. My own work suggests that by the mid-Victorian period, Unitarian feminists were drawing on both the mainstream and radical strands of their denomination's heritage to form arguments in favour of women's rights. Plant, "'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus'".

middle-class denomination which sanctioned female preaching.⁴¹ Yet the meaning of gender in the Society of Friends during this period has received scarcely any attention. Gender historians looking at Quakerism have been consistently more attracted to the beliefs and practices of women Friends in the seventeenth-century when they first assumed a conspicuous, and controversial, presence as religious visionaries, preachers and prophetesses.⁴² Sheila Wright's work on York Monthly Meeting between 1780 and 1860 stands alone in providing a detailed insight into the denominational lives of Quaker women during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wright demonstrates how the ministry of women was instrumental in stimulating the growth in membership which York Meeting uniquely experienced in the early nineteenth century.⁴³ Adopting a somewhat different perspective, Margaret Hope Bacon has pointed to the importance of transatlantic Quaker networks in bringing to fruition the struggle by women to establish their own nationwide Yearly Meeting for discipline during the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ The enduring importance to women Friends' of their transatlantic relationships during the nineteenth century is illustrated by Sandra Holton. Exploring the feminist activities of women connected with the prominent Quaker Bright family, Holton traces the evolution of women's rights activism among members of this circle over several generations from its origins in early anti-slavery agitation. A crucial stimulus to their developing feminist consciousness was provided by the personal relationships which they

⁴¹Although for several decades women preachers also operated within Wesleyan Methodism, the legitimacy of their role was always viewed with ambivalence or outright opposition, their special dispensation to preach did not long survive Wesley's death in 1791. See Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (London, 1992). Women preachers continued to be active leaders in the Bible Christian and Primitive Methodist sects. However, these communities were quite different from Friends in that they drew their adherents from among the labouring poor. See Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: female preaching and popular religion in industrial England* (Princeton, 1985); *idem.*, 'Cottage religion and the politics of survival,' in Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different*, pp. 31-56. See also Wesley F. Swift, 'The women itinerant preachers of early Methodism,' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 28 (1952), pp. 89-94 and 29 (1953), pp. 76-83. Curiously, there is no discussion of the thread of continuity which Quaker women provide for women preachers within the Protestantism tradition in Olive Anderson's classic study, 'Women preachers in mid-Victorian Britain: some reflections on feminism, popular religion and social change,' *Historical Journal*, 12 (1969), pp. 467-484.

⁴²The earliest historical study of Quaker women dealt with the seventeenth century: Mabel Richmond Brailsford, *Quaker Women, 1650-1690*, (London, 1915). More recently, important work has been carried out in Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: ecstatic prophecy in seventeenth-century England*, (Berkeley, 1994); Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, (London, 1993); Christine Trevett, *Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century*, second ed. (York, 1995); Kate Peters, 'Women's Speaking Justified: women and discipline in the early Quaker movement,' *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998), pp. 205-234.

⁴³Wright, *Friends in York*, especially chapter 3; *idem.*, 'Quakerism and its implications for Quaker women,' *Studies in Church History*, 27 (1990), pp. 403-414.

⁴⁴Margaret Hope Bacon, 'The establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting: a transatlantic concern,' *JFHS*, 57 (1995), pp. 151-165.

forged with American feminists through shared Quaker contacts.⁴⁵ It is striking to note, however, the similarity between Elizabeth Isichei's reflection on the noticeable presence of Quaker women in Victorian feminism that, 'Both the relative scope which women enjoyed, and their lack of equality with men in the Society's organisation, tended to sensitize their minds to the relative position of the sexes,'⁴⁶ and the observations made by Kathryn Gleadle on Unitarian women noted above. Both suggest that within these two denominations gender attitudes were complex and often contradictory.⁴⁷

Existing scholarship indicates, then, that although they were in many ways very different, the Society of Friends and Unitarianism also shared important common characteristics during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. Their memberships were drawn from similar, middling-status backgrounds, and they both held marginal theological beliefs which did not reflect the prevailing evangelical tendency of the period. Furthermore, both appear to have assumed a distinctive stance with regard to gender relations and roles. Closer investigation into the meanings of gender within Quakerism and Unitarianism thus offers the prospect of shedding light on the variety and complexity of ways in which religious affiliation operated as a factor influencing women's lives during the period.

⁴⁵Holton, 'From anti-slavery to suffrage militancy.' The paucity of studies charting the evolution of feminism among nineteenth-century British Quaker women contrasts with the American historiography. There, research has evidently been stimulated by the clear impulse given to women's rights activism among some American Friends by the Hicksite separation of the mid-1820s. See Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: the story of Quaker women in America* (Philadelphia, 1986); Nancy Hewitt, 'Yankee Evangelicals and agrarian Quakers: gender, religion and class in the formation of a feminist consciousness in nineteenth-century Rochester, New York,' *Radical History Review*, 30 (1984), pp. 327-342; *idem.*, 'Feminist Friends: agrarian Quakers and the emergence of women's rights in America,' *Feminist Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 27-49; Elisabeth Potts Brown and Susan Mosher Stuard (eds.), *Witnesses for Change: Quaker women over three centuries* (New Brunswick and London, 1989).

⁴⁶Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, p. 153. The tensions surrounding the status and roles of women in Quaker organisation are also highlighted in Mary Jane Godlee, 'The Women's Meeting,' in [Society of Friends,] *London Yearly Meeting During 250 Years* (London, 1919), pp. 93-116.

⁴⁷The work which has been carried out on the motivations for feminist activism among Quakers and Unitarians to date has focused overwhelmingly on women. It is clear that men from both denominations worked in support of feminist aims and objectives, although the reasons for male activism have been little explored. Kathryn Gleadle's work, however, does address this issue. She suggests that male involvement in radical unitarian feminism reflected the commitment of both radical unitarian men and women to a wide variety of political reform campaigns. For them feminism was "but one facet of a larger ideological plan. It was that which made their vision of a liberal, educated and free society complete." My work on the relationship between Unitarianism and feminism in Birmingham in the 1870s and 1880s suggests that such an holistic understanding of reform, of which women's rights activism was one aspect, continued to inform the perspectives of progressive Unitarian men. Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, p. 174; Plant, "'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.'" Both of these studies indicate that a greater degree of direct cooperation between male and female activists characterized the Unitarian feminism of the 1840s to 1880s than is suggested in the explorations into male support for women's suffrage in subsequent decades edited by Angela V John and Claire Eustance (eds.), *The Men's Share?: masculinities, male support and women's suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920* (London, 1997).

Work carried out to date in the fields of women's and gender history indicates that the most fruitful way of gaining insight into the gendered nature of religious beliefs and practices is through denominationally focussed studies. Adopting that perspective allows for an integrated exploration of the theological and theoretical bases on which a denomination's ideas about gender were constructed on one hand and of the implications for women of these ideas as revealed through their lived experiences on the other hand. As Barker and Chalus observe, historians' understanding of gender is to some extent determined by the sources on which they choose to focus. Examining prescriptive literature, for example, provides insights into the ways in which gender was theorized and discussed whilst looking at the recorded experiences of real individuals through, for instance, biographical writings may provide a different picture because 'the ways that gender was played out in daily life differed from the ways that it was discussed in guides or periodicals.'⁴⁸ In order to understand fully the relationship between religion and gender it is necessary to undertake both types of investigation, recapturing the beliefs and values of the denominations in question, as well as the ways in which these structured reality, including the meaning of gender, for their adherents.⁴⁹ As I noted at the start of this introduction, religion has often been seen by historians as something of a double-edged sword for women, at once potentially both liberating and constricting. It is only possible to assess the extent to which religious beliefs operated as a source of repression, or were appropriated and negotiated by women as a source of empowerment, if practical experience is viewed in relation to the conceptual framework of beliefs and values in which it occurred.

In the first part of this thesis, therefore, I shall be exploring how gender was conceptualized within the Society of Friends and Unitarianism in England over the period from 1770 to 1830. It should be stressed here that whilst this study is primarily concerned to investigate the content, development and implications of Quaker and Unitarian attitudes towards gender with reference to the position of women it will also pay some attention to the ways in which masculinity was constructed in the two denominations. Historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have only recently begun to address the need for men to be studied as gendered subjects. Their insights have highlighted the importance of recognising how gender is constructed in a relational way, with ideas about femininity and masculinity

⁴⁸Barker and Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-century England*, pp. 25-6.

⁴⁹Ursula King, 'Gender and the study of religion,' in *idem.* (ed.) *Religion and Gender* (Oxford, 1995), p. 4.

being only partly comprehensible unless viewed in relation to one another.⁵⁰ An important aspect of *Family Fortunes* is its focus on men as well as women. There, Davidoff and Hall argue that a model of middle-class 'manliness' was constructed under the influence of evangelicalism, which broke sharply with eighteenth-century gentry and aristocratic standards of masculinity which had esteemed sporting and sexual prowess. The new ideal stressed deep commitment to evangelical Christianity, strong attachment to domestic life, and the duty of work as the hallmarks of moral and social worthiness. The Christian man was responsible for governing his household (wife, children and servants) to promote its spiritual welfare, for example by directing daily religious observance. His attachment to 'serious' religion and domestic life revealed a character in which the exercise of authority was tempered with tenderness, affection and even sentimental emotion.⁵¹ To date, Davidoff and Hall's findings on masculinity have not been subjected to interrogation on the same level as their arguments relating to femininity, but again the overarching reliance on evangelical codes seems problematic.⁵² For the purposes of this study it seems not only potentially illuminating but also highly necessary to consider how ideals of masculinity and femininity were constructed relative to one another within Quakerism and Unitarianism, as together these attitudes produced the overall gender ideology of each denomination.

Quakerism and Unitarianism will be dealt with in separate chapters, because it is clear that the meanings which each denomination attached to gender were a direct outgrowth of their individual theologies and cannot be understood apart from these. Friends' Quietist mysticism and Unitarians' rationalism underpinned very distinctive ideas about the nature of God, of

⁵⁰The pioneering essay on the need for a gendered history of men is John Tosh, 'What should historians do with masculinity?: Reflections on nineteenth-century Britain,' *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), pp.179-202. See also *idem.*, *A Man's Place: masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England*, (New Haven, 1999); Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991), especially pp. 1-14; John and Eustance (eds.), *The Men's Share?*; James Mangan and James Walvin (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: middle-class masculinities in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1991). Studies looking at gender and religion which address masculinity have slowly begun to emerge, although those which have remain somewhat apart from the mainstream of gender history. See Jeremy Gregory, 'Gender and the clerical profession in England, 1660-1850,' *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998), pp. 235-27; John Tosh, 'Methodist domesticity and middle-class masculinity in nineteenth-century England,' *ibid.*, pp. 323-345; Sean Gill, 'How muscular was Victorian Christianity? Thomas Hughes and the cult of Christian manliness reconsidered,' *ibid.*, pp. 421-430.

⁵¹Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, especially pp. 108-113.

⁵²Dror Wahrman has questioned the proposition that during the early nineteenth century middle-class men's claims of worth in the political public sphere were articulated in terms which invoked their superior domestic virtues. Analysing the language of political discourse during the Queen Caroline affair, Wahrman contends that in political rhetoric before 1832 the values of the middle class were identified solely with its traditional public, masculine qualities of 'manly' informed independence Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: the political representation of class in Britain, 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995), ch. 11.

humanity, and of the ways in which God's will was made known to humanity through divine revelation. Nevertheless, both Friends' faith in the common identity of all people as receptacles of the Inner Light and hence as potential mediums for the word of God, and Unitarians' belief in the shared rational capacity of every individual meant that the basic argument of each denomination on the relative status of women and men, in human as well as spiritual terms, stressed equality. But in no sense did this assertion imply that either perspective was 'gender blind'. Writings from a broad range of genres which offer insight into Quaker and Unitarian gender ideology reveal a strong appreciation of the importance and implications of sexual difference which could be reconciled with notions of equality; assertions of equal status between men and women did not automatically translate in arguments claiming identical natures or social roles. Representations of model women in both denominations overwhelmingly envisaged their activities in relation to family relationships, especially those with husbands and children, and household responsibilities. At the same time, however, it is clear that Friends' conviction that women might be divinely called to undertake God's work and were permitted to fulfil the full range of spiritual leadership roles, had profound implications, enabling them to articulate views about the roles and responsibilities of women which stressed individual autonomy, under God, from familial and social obligations in a way which Unitarians did not.

In the second part of the thesis the focus will shift from concepts of gender within Quakerism and Unitarianism to the practical implications of religious affiliation for women who belonged to the two denominations. These implications will be investigated through a detailed regional study of the beliefs, status and roles of women belonging to the Quaker and Unitarian communities of Yorkshire. Adopting this regional approach reflects the way in which county-wide links bound the members of each group into closely-knit, individual communities within the wider national denominational framework. In the Society of Friends, this cohesion sprang from its pyramid organisational structure. Individual local Meetings belonged to larger regional Meetings which were convened each quarter and acted as a medium between them and the national Quaker organisation. The main function of Quarterly Meetings was to transact Society business, addressing weighty or difficult matters brought by delegates from the localities, and sending them back with advice, censure and reports from the national hierarchy. But they also served important social functions, providing a forum for the making and renewing of friendships and other connections. Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting was roughly coextensive with the county,⁵³ and it is evident from the records of both the Quarterly Meeting

⁵³W. F. Thistlethwaite, *Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of the Society of Friends, 1665-1966* (Harrogate, 1979).

and its constituent Meetings that there were high levels of mobility, friendship and marriage across the region.⁵⁴ Yorkshire Unitarianism had no such official framework for binding together individual congregations and their members, but it is clear that nevertheless an informal Unitarian network operated across the county which traced its origins to the earliest days of the movement in the 1760s and 1770s. Both ministers and laymen in Yorkshire were involved in radical political ventures before 1800 and in liberal cultural initiatives and organisations for social and political reform afterwards. The arrival of Manchester College in York in 1803 provided a focal point for Unitarianism in the area. Ministers of the local chapels had long been in the practice of preaching from one another's pulpits but in 1816 closer links between the congregations were facilitated by the foundation of the West Riding Tract Society, an organisation for the distribution of Unitarian literature whose annual meetings lay and clerical subscribers were invited to attend.⁵⁵ And as with Quakers, it is evident that a web of kinship and friendship ties bound families and individuals together across the county.

The aim of this regional study is to uncover the meanings which membership of Quaker and Unitarian communities had for women. To some extent, certainly, I am concerned to assess the extent to which the gender ideologies mapped out in Part One shaped and were reflected in the lived experiences of women. However, simply seeking crude parallels between theory and practice can, as Lawrence Klein, for example, stresses, be deeply misleading, tending to result in all activities which appear not to be sanctioned by theory being classified as 'transgressive.'⁵⁶ A potentially more illuminating approach is to the search for the factors which actually underpinned women's practical experiences. The gender ideology of these denominations did play a significant part in determining what roles and opportunities were open to women members, but at the same time it is apparent that individual women could interpret and negotiate this ideology in a wide variety of ways. It was far from the case that all women among either Friends or Unitarians experienced their religion identically. Crucially, it is vital to recognise that however central their religious affiliation was to women's lives - and

⁵⁴Besides Thistlethwaite's survey of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting (*ibid.*) some of the separate Monthly Meetings have been researched. See Wright, *Friends in York*; Stephen Allott, *Friends in York: the Quaker story in the life of a Meeting* (York, 1978); Wilfred Allott, 'Leeds Quaker Meeting,' *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 50 (1965), pp. 1-77; H. R. Hodgson, *The Society of Friends in Bradford: a record of 270 years* (Bradford, 1926).

⁵⁵Frank Waller and John F. Goodchild, *Unitarianism in Yorkshire: a short history* (privately printed, Wakefield, 1962); Seed, 'Unitarianism and the formation of liberal culture'; *idem.*, 'Gentlemen Dissenters: the social and political meanings of Rational Dissent,' *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), pp. 299-335; *idem.*, "'A set of men powerful enough in many things": Rational Dissent and political opposition in England, 1770-1790,' in Haakonssen (ed.) *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 140-168; David L. Wykes, 'Manchester College at York (1803-40): its intellectual and cultural contribution,' *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 63 (1991), pp. 207-18.

⁵⁶Klein, 'Gender and the public/private distinction,' p. 101.

that itself was a matter of great individual variety - it was not the sole ingredient in their personal identities. Variables produced by social and economic status, family background and relationships, marital status and locality could all cut across women's shared identities as Friends or Unitarians to produce wide diversity in personal experiences. Focussing on an area with the geographical diverseness of Yorkshire illustrates well how such factors operated.

The first two chapters in this section explore the position of Yorkshire's Quaker and Unitarian women respectively with particular reference to the status and roles which they occupied within their own denominational communities. The right which women Friends enjoyed to exercise spiritual authority within the Society had tremendous implications, especially for those who became ministers, as Sheila Wright has also shown with reference to York Monthly Meeting.⁵⁷ These ministers formed an influential, closely-bonded upper stratum in the Quarterly Meeting. They shared a strong sense of female identity, wielded spiritual and moral leadership over their co-religionists of both sexes and had a considerable degree of freedom to move about in the duties of their calling. Even those women who did not have the recognised gift to work in the ministry, however, were able to make a limited contribution to the running of the Society which gave them horizons beyond the home. Unitarian women, of course, had no such formal responsibilities, but they certainly did not occupy the inert, disengaged position within their community suggested by the work of John Seed. His analysis identifies Unitarianism as a religion which appealed to property-owning, servant-employing men because it legitimised their social, political and economic values and ambitions. Women feature only as passive symbols, shepherded into family pews on Sundays to underline the patriarchal authority of their menfolk⁵⁸. Yet the experiences of Yorkshire's Unitarian women indicate not only that through their chapel and community membership some enjoyed access to a range of activities designed to encourage personal intellectual development and obtained formal outlets for autonomous religious expression, but also that the active participation of women alongside men was recognised to be central to the creation of Unitarianism's liberal cultural milieu. Particularly striking are the experiences of one Unitarian woman, Catharine Cappe of York, whose life is explored in some depth. Whilst she was in many ways exceptional Catharine should not be regarded as wholly unrepresentative of her sex and denomination. The important roles which she was able to carve out for herself in the local Unitarian community often tended to amplify rather than to contradict the essence of the roles undertaken by some

⁵⁷Wright, 'Quakerism and its implications for Quaker women;' *idem.*, *Friends in York*, ch. 3.

⁵⁸'Formation of liberal culture,' pp. 275-6; 'Theologies of power.' *passim*.

of her female co-religionists.

Exploring the denominational lives of Quaker and Unitarian women highlights the inability of the 'separate spheres' model to provide a universal conceptual framework within which to analyse the meanings of gender. The domestic sphere and the chapel, meeting house or other sectarian institution cannot be neatly categorised respectively as private and public domains associated with gender. Religious beliefs drew women and men together as members of discrete communities, so that the boundaries between members' homes and the institutional centres of the denomination were highly permeable. Within both locations women and men joined in undertaking roles and responsibilities, albeit not always identical ones, which together served to affirm and transmit the values of their communities as a whole. In a sense, the most important conceptual distinction for Unitarians and, especially, for Friends, was between those who shared their religious identity and those who did not.

Of course, neither denomination operated in a vacuum and the final chapter of the thesis explores the ways in which Quaker and Unitarian women's particular denominational backgrounds shaped their interaction with the world beyond their communities, through a local study based on the city of York. The sole route open for women to participate in the inter-denominational Christian community was through philanthropy. Tracing their patterns of involvement in philanthropic work brings into sharp focus the complex and changing relationship over time of the two denominations to the dominant evangelical current of the period. Both the expansion of philanthropic ventures and the increase of women's involvement in them which took place from the end of the eighteenth century onwards were practical expressions of the increasing influence of evangelical tenets on society, and charitable exertion became a hallmark of the committed Christian. Quakers and Unitarians shared the philanthropic concerns of evangelicals, and cooperated with them in cross-denominational ventures. It is clear, however, that the two denominations drew heavily on their traditional sectarian heritages, which owed little to evangelicalism, to legitimise their participation. Specific denominational discourses, including ideologies of gender, can be uncovered underpinning the claims by women from these backgrounds that they too had the right and duty to undertake philanthropic responsibilities.

This study of the Society of Friends and Unitarianism is comparative, but with the exception of the final chapter the denominations will be dealt with in separate chapters, and analysed comparatively in the conclusion. This approach suggested itself as being more appropriate than a thematically comparative one for two main reasons. First, because it allows for a more integrated exploration of the ways in which gender attitudes and practices evolved

within the differing and distinctive frameworks of religious belief and practice produced by each denomination. As I have discussed above, the objective of this thesis is to draw out the nuances and diversities in the relationship between religion and the meaning of gender, so it is important to maintain the denominational focus. Secondly, and reflecting the inherent differences between the denominations, the surviving sources from which it is possible to investigate the conceptualization and practice of gender relations and roles differ considerably. For each denomination different aspects of the relationship between gender and religion, and the ways in which this relationship affected the lives of Quaker and Unitarian women, are revealed and can be explored, and short introductory sections to the two parts of the thesis discuss comparatively the question of sources.

Part One
Religion and Ideology

Introduction to Part One

Defining the nature, status and appropriate roles of women and analysing the implications of sexual difference were not primary preoccupations for either the Society of Friends or Unitarianism between 1770 and 1830. A far greater amount of time, effort and ink was devoted to the clarification of core beliefs on the nature of God and of humanity and on the means of divine revelation, and to negotiating their position as Dissenters within the State. Nevertheless, for each denomination the gender ideology which its members espoused was an integral component of its creed, formulated to complement its wider teachings and perspective. When Friends and Unitarians articulated their views on femininity, not only their interpretations but also their motivations and *the media which they used reflected the* distinctive character and heritage of each denomination.

Unitarian writings on the position of women can be located within the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century arena of literary discussion about the meaning of gender, often focussing especially on femininity, to which moralists, intellectuals and social theorists from a range of backgrounds contributed. The Enlightenment and the Evangelical Revival both advanced new ways of looking at the world and at the place of humankind within it, whilst the twin expansions of literacy and the culture of print fostered the expression and exchange of ideas through a variety of print media about all aspects of human existence, including the implications of sexual difference. Writers of both sexes interpreted femininity from many different ideological viewpoints and drew multiple conclusions, but they shared the fundamental assumption that the biological differences between women and men gave rise to distinctive female and male attributes which in turn indicated the social roles for which each of the sexes was qualified and indeed destined.¹ They set out to delineate the model of gender relations which would underpin their particular vision of society. The Unitarian elite of liberally educated men and women espoused their theories about gender partly with the aim of prompting their co-religionists to put such ideas into practice, but they hoped too that their ideas would have a wider purchase. In the spirit of Enlightenment optimism, they envisaged themselves in the forefront of the drive to create a rational, educated, liberal and free society

¹See. Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: women in Britain, France and the United States, 178-1860* (Basingstoke, 1985); Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-century England: roles, representations and responsibilities* (London, 1997), especially 'Introduction'; Vivien Jones (ed.), *Women in the Eighteenth Century: constructions of femininity* (London, 1990); Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: women, friendship and the life of the mind in eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1990); Katharine M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-century England* (Brighton, 1982).

in which all people would gradually be able to develop their full innate potential for happiness. Their gender ideology was one facet of a thoroughgoing programme aimed at reforming attitudes to enable society as a whole to advance.

Friends pursued a quite different agenda. Their quest for cultural separateness reached its high point during the eighteenth century, when the Society operated as a partially closed community with a strong sense of shared identity as a divinely-selected 'living remnant' of true believers. Its members were concerned to discover and practise the behaviour appropriate for God's chosen people. In 1770, for example, the printed *Epistle* from London Yearly Meeting cautioned,

If we suffer our minds to wander from the pure and holy witness of truth, that is placed in every heart, we slide insensibly into the spirit of the world, and the corrupt manners and practices thereof: hence proceed those light and airy appearances, fantastical dresses, unsound language, unprofitable discourses and inconsistent conduct, which too plainly denote a lamentable declension.²

In keeping with this attitude, Quakers who expressed ideas about femininity did so almost exclusively with reference to the character and conduct appropriate to women Friends. Their doctrines were developed without concern to influence ideas about gender beyond their own denomination.³ Moreover, their perspective was rooted in over a century of sectarian tradition and was devoted to maintaining continuity with the doctrines and values of the movement's founding figures and early luminaries. As we shall see, there was considerable debate in the later eighteenth century about the form and extent of official female authority in the Society, and both the advocates and the opponents of wider formal recognition of women's role and function formulated their arguments for in terms which emphasised the unity of their views with traditional Quaker teaching.

The sources available for investigating how femininity was conceptualized in both

²[Society of Friends,] *Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends Held in London* (2 vols., London, 1858), ii, p. 3.

³An exception to this trend was Priscilla Wakefield, who drew on Enlightenment discourses to develop arguments in favour of women's education and employment opportunities. See *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for its Improvement*, second ed. (London, 1817). Although important, her work lies outside the scope of this study. Although Friends neither routinely engaged in wider debates about position of women nor sought to influence the gender attitudes of those outside their circle, there is evidence to suggest that by the late eighteenth century those in the contemporary mainstream were positively interested in the character and conduct of women Friends. As Patricia Michaelson observed, 'Quaker women were routinely praised in the dominant culture, even held up as models of dignity.' See 'Religious bases of eighteenth-century feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Quakers,' *Women's Studies*, 22 (1993), pp. 281-295. The fullest and most favourable appraisal of Quaker women, to which reference will be made in this study, occurs in Thomas Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism* (3 vols., London, 1806).

Unitarianism and the Society of Friends fall into two broad categories, although the denominational content in each of these categories differs.. First, there are writings through which leading members of the denominations sought explicitly to coax their listeners and readers into complying with particular views about the nature and proper roles of women. Amongst Unitarians, this project was conducted through, for example, sermons and discourses, articles for sectarian periodicals, conduct manuals and poetry. Such pieces were produced primarily by leading Unitarian ministers and a small number of prominent lay members, male and female. Unlike Friends, Unitarians had no established denominational tradition on which to draw when constructing their gender ideology, aiming rather to develop a viewpoint which harmonised with the beliefs and values of emergent Unitarianism. In a sense, therefore, these writings can be viewed as both an exercise in self-definition and denominational propaganda, articulating their stance on an emotive issue of current concern - the position of women.

The didactic writings by Friends which addressed the status and roles of women were produced largely as a result of the Society's pyramid organisational structure. At national, regional and local levels Meetings were responsible for drawing up so-called 'epistles' and minutes containing advice, encouragement and censure which were read aloud in Meetings for discipline or circulated for the instruction of members and constituent Meetings. Theoretically, these reports were expressions of the consensus of opinion in the Meetings, although in practice they were drafted by groups of leading Friends charged with the responsibility of interpreting the mood of the gathering. In the communications between women's Meetings in particular, detailed analysis of women's position was offered, written by and for women. Individual Friends of recognised spiritual capacity were also free to address epistles to specific groups or the Society at large. In addition, the pronouncements on women's place in the church by George Fox, the most influential early leader of the Quaker movement, still carried their full weight in the period under discussion here. During the nineteenth century a further genre of related writing emerged when a number of leading male Friends whose perspectives were informed by evangelical thinking published comprehensive accounts of Quaker beliefs and practices which touched upon attitudes towards women.

The second group of sources in which the constructions of femininity prevailing within Unitarianism and Quakerism can be uncovered are biographical and autobiographical writings. These texts describe the character and conduct of each denomination's female exemplars, and the insights into such writings offered by literary historians of gender are helpful. As Vivien Jones, for example, has stressed, accounts of exemplary women must be approached as

representations which were fashioned to conform to a particular set of values, rather than as strictly factual accounts of women's lives.⁴ These sources are therefore an especially valuable and revealing means of exploring how each denomination idealised the nature and roles of women. Again, though, there are substantial differences between the accounts of this type produced by Unitarians and those written by Friends.

Very few biographies and autobiographies exist of Unitarian women. Those which do deal almost solely with the lives of women who had achieved wider public acclaim, usually through their outstanding achievements in the literary field. Although these women were enthusiastically claimed by the Unitarian movement, in biographical accounts their Unitarianism appears at most as a sub-plot to the rest of their lives. The apparent lack of attention to the part which their rational religious beliefs played in nurturing the development of their talent could prove frustrating for those who would have liked to harness evidence of female genius for the purpose of denominational propaganda. In 1825 the Unitarian periodical the *Monthly Repository* reviewed Lucy Aikin's two-volume memoir and collected works of her aunt, the celebrated poet and author, Anna Laetitia Barbauld.⁵ The reviewer praised the work, but felt compelled to lament,

that her character as a Christian was not made more prominent, and that her general views of divine truth are not more precisely delineated. Her belief in the Christian Revelation, her trust in a merciful Providence, and her attachment to the principles of the liberal Dissenters, are apparent in her Works; but her admirers cannot check the desire of knowing the whole history of her mind, in relation to these momentous subjects. ... [T]he sentiments would, we are persuaded, have been a new and valuable testimony on behalf of those principles of Christian truth that most highly exalt the benevolence of the Divine character, and the wisdom and equity of the moral governance of the universe.⁶

The reviewer should not, perhaps, have been surprised at the lack of discussion of Barbauld's personal piety in her biography. Aikin herself wrote from a perspective acutely informed by identity with the Rational Dissenting heritage.⁷ More generally, Unitarianism as a system of faith and practice strove to develop a rational understanding of God and of the rules by which divine creation was governed, and as such, it tended not to stimulate or even to encourage

⁴Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, especially pp. 1-13.

⁵Lucy Aikin, *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, with a Memoir* (2 vols., London, 1825).

⁶*MR*, 20 (1825), p. 487.

⁷See, for example, her comments to William Ellery Channing in 1828 quoted in P. H. le Breton, *Memoirs, Miscellanies and Letters of the Late Lucy Aikin* (London, 1864), pp. 196-7.

introspective analysis of personal religious feelings and emotions by its adherents. Of course, as the early generation of ministers who helped to define the denomination moved to a Unitarian position from orthodoxy this shift was carefully chronicled in their memoirs. However, the change was depicted as the simple and inevitable consequence of unprejudiced religious enquiry; anyone who was equally liberal and inquisitive would naturally draw the same conclusions. In view of the paucity of life histories of Unitarian women, the most important denominational sources of representations of exemplary figures are the thumbnail sketches of ministers wives which appeared in autobiographical and biographical accounts of Unitarian ministers.. Complementing her esteemed husband, the minister's wife stood as the model Unitarian woman. The inclusion of images of wives in the memoirs of ministers highlights the importance of keeping in mind the relational way in which femininity and masculinity are forged in any given context. To a certain degree, when a minister's wife was introduced into the picture, her portrait was actually intended to convey information to the readership about the character of the main biographical subject, her husband. Indeed, analysing these constructions of femininity in conjunction with the other depictions of ministers' relations with women which occasionally occur in biographies makes it clear that demonstrating adherence to a particular model of attitudes and behaviour with respect to women was itself a crucial element of Unitarian masculinity.

Among Friends the case was very different. Obituaries offer straightforward representations of exemplary women Friends produced for a Quaker audience, especially obituaries, but more important is the vast body of autobiographical writings which reveal in rich colour Friends' understanding of femininity. Quakerism was a mystical, experiential religion. The emphasis which it placed on personal experience of God as the only true way of knowing the divine will stimulated the production of a specific genre of sectarian literature, much of it written by women, in which individuals described and analysed in detail their personal spiritual experiences. At a published level, this genre comprises spiritual journals, memoirs and autobiographies, and these works served two main functions. Authors charting their spiritual history could identify the evidence which personal experience provided of the success or otherwise of their personal struggle to become more receptive and obedient to God's guidance. For the wider readership, such works could act as an aid to the maturing of their own piety.⁸ A wealth of unpublished material in the form of spiritual diaries and memoirs

⁸This latter purpose might be explicitly stated in an editorial preface. For example, in 1795 an autobiographical account of Sarah Tuke Grubb's life was published, 'under a hope that an account of the humble, self-denying and dedicated servant will prove the means of instructing others and of strengthening their faith in the efficacy of that Divine Principle "which wrought all her works in her"'. [Sarah (Tuke) Grubb,] *Some Account of the Life*

supplements these published works. Committed Friends had been writing spiritual autobiographies since the seventeenth century, and by the period under discussion here it was a well-established practice in which entrenched generic patterns had evolved.⁹ To some degree this generic model was followed by both men and women Friends, and their autobiographical writings contain many similarities. Distinctively male and female representations of religious experience can, however, be discerned. Scholars working within both gender history and feminist theology have argued for the importance of breaking away from the traditional approach of mainstream religious studies in which 'religious experience' has been treated as a discrete phenomenon, and analysis of its social context has been regarded as at best of only secondary importance and at worst reductionist.¹⁰ Rather, they have stressed that female and male accounts of religious experience can only be understood in terms of the specific gendered context in which they evolved. In her study of the writings of women from seventeenth-century radical sects, including Quakerism, Hilary Hinds highlights the difficulties which arise when using texts to investigate religious experience from the need to recapture both the textually constructed nature of the author and the historicity of the living, breathing writer. Hinds suggests that the problem may be resolved by approaching the 'author figure' as an historically-specific construct. Such an approach allows for the exploration both of the gender discourses and practices which informed the author in the production of texts and of the ways in which that gendered authorship itself generated particular themes and patterns within texts.¹¹ Hinds' model seems to offer an appropriate formula for dealing with the writings of eighteenth-century Friends too, as it indicates that exploring both the gendered context and construction of women's and men's representations of religious experience illuminates the

and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb, second ed. (London, 1796), p. i.

⁹With variations, autobiographies and memoirs followed a pattern of personal development in which early religious impressions gained from a pious upbringing in childhood gave way to a youthful folly. Acts of sinfulness ranging from the refusal to observe Friends' peculiar codes of behaviour in, for example, matters of dress, to fairly sustained bouts of indulgence in the pleasures of 'the world' are committed, but not without occasional sensations of remorse and regret. The conversion out of sinfulness and into obedience to the Inner Light can be stimulated by any number of factors, such as the intercession of a more experienced Friend. During conversion, an individual would be consumed with a sense of her unique unworthiness and the power and goodness of God in being willing and able to subdue such sinful propensities. After submitting to the divine will, and inward call to make the will of God known to others is experienced which, although resisted for a time due to fear and self-doubt, is eventually fulfilled. For a discussion of the evolution of women Friends' spiritual autobiographies from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries see Felicity A. Nussbaum, *the Autobiographical Subject: gender and ideology in eighteenth-century England* (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 154-177.

¹⁰See Rosalind Shaw, 'Feminist anthropology and the gendering of religious studies,' in Ursula King (ed.), *Religion and Gender* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 65-76.

¹¹Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: seventeenth-century radical sectarian writing and feminist criticism* (Manchester, 1996).

Society's conceptualization of gender.

The authority to define and represent the nature and position of women in both Unitarianism and Quakerism was claimed by a narrow elite, but the composition of these elites and the grounds on which they were distinguished from their co-religionists differed greatly between the denominations with important implications for the level of influence exerted by women themselves in the construction of doctrines on femininity. Unitarianism's upper strata was composed chiefly of the movement's intellectual leaders - ministers and other literary and scientific luminaries - who were predominantly although not exclusively male. In contrast, those who made up the leadership within the Society of Friends were set apart by their superior capacity for spiritual insight. The admission of spiritually gifted women and men to the most authoritative office in the Society, that of minister, on equal terms placed women Friends in a uniquely powerful position to develop and articulate theories of gender and sexual difference and gave their writings a claim to the highest respect of their co-religionists.

Chapter One

‘Although the weaker vessels by nature:’ women, gender and religious authority in the Society of Friends.

Introduction

When the Anglican abolitionist Thomas Clarkson wrote on the peculiar religious beliefs and practices of the Society of Friends in his three-volume *Portraiture of Quakerism* (1806) some of his highest praise was reserved for the position which Friends accorded to women in their community. He argued that the Quakers alone among the professing churches testified to the true spirit of the Christian dispensation by adopting organizational practices which acknowledged the equality of women with men:

Believing them to have adequate capacities, and to be capable of great usefulness; they have admitted them to a share of the administration of almost all the offices which belong to their religious discipline, so that, independently of their private, they have a public character, like the men.¹

Clarkson’s observations target the most striking and distinctive aspect of Quaker gender practice: the undertaking by women of ministering and administrative responsibilities alongside their male co-religionists. However, the straightforward explanation which he offers of the positive beliefs underlying these practices obscures the complicated nature of the ideas which were expressed by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Friends about the place of women in the Society. Historically, the equal right to minister granted to Quaker women was not matched in the Society’s executive and administrative structure, but by the mid-eighteenth century women Friends had emerged as the major force within the ministry and from that authoritative position began to demand a greater share in the disciplinary process. The tensions and ambiguities of women’s position were enhanced by the ways in which Friends’ conceptualization of both femininity and spirituality apparently suggested the naturally greater spiritual capacity of women. In addition, in the early nineteenth century the traditional mystical basis of Friends’ faith and practice faced a challenge from some prominent Friends who sought to affirm the Society’s allegiance to the core beliefs of contemporary

¹Thomas Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism*, (3 vols., London, 1806), iii, pp. 289-296.

evangelicalism, and that development had implications for the way in which the position of women Friends was viewed. This chapter explores the complexities and evolution of Friends' thinking on the meaning of gender between 1770 and 1830, specifically focusing on the implications of this for their attitudes towards the nature, status and roles of women.

Theology and church organization

Since its beginnings in the second half of the seventeenth century Quakerism was a mystical form of Christianity which stressed the direct, personal revelation of God to each individual believer as the heart of religion. Friends believed that there existed 'that of God' in the soul of every individual human being, so that God was not an external object of worship but rather an indwelling, living force whose will and precepts were revealed, experienced and understood at first-hand via this divine spark, the Inner Light. Robert Barclay, the seventeenth-century author of the classic and enduring exposition of mystical Quakerism, asserted that this inward revelation of the divine will was, '*the only sure and certain way to attain the true and saving knowledge of God.*'² In addition to this general mystical basis of belief and practice, for over a hundred years from the late seventeenth century Quakerism was directed by the particular mystical trend known as Quietism. This current of thought was grounded in a cosmology which identified a fundamental split between divinely acquired (pure) and humanly acquired (impure) knowledge. Humankind by its own workings was utterly incapable of producing any word or deed of religious or moral worth. For the pure voice of God to speak through the Inner Light to impart true knowledge there must be a complete silencing of all activity that is human and hence depraved. Achieving such a state of being required not only literal retirement from the bustle and turmoil of the outside world but also silence within, through the annihilation of self-will and the suppression of any attempt at self-direction. Human impulses, urges, passions and identities had to be stilled in order to expose the eternal soul within to divine impressions.³ Only when the impure natural 'creature' was utterly subdued

²Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: Being an Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People Called Quakers* (1675, reprinted London, 1736), p. 25. Barclay's *Apology* remained popular among Quietist Friends well into the Victorian period: Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford, 1970), p. 19.

³The fullest discussion of Quietism, and of its meaning in the Society of Friends, is contained in *LPQ*, chs. 2 and 3. Jones argues that although Quietism was an important religious trend which manifested itself throughout the western world during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'nowhere else was Quietism so completely absorbed and carried on in all its essential forms as in English and American Quakerism from 1725 to 1825,' p. 34, p.57. Quietism did surface elsewhere in English Christianity, however, notably in early Methodism. In 1740

could the pure divine element make its will known.

Each Friend was expected to strive towards attaining a state of mental stillness in which they could commune inwardly, personally, with God. But achieving this perfect spiritual surrender of the self to God - the Quaker conversion experience - marked just the first of two successive stages in the relationship which the Inner Light made possible between each person and the divine. Quietism should not be misunderstood as signifying religious inertia, for as a system of worship it has a deeply active intent. As Rufus Jones describes, Quietism is not a question of action or inaction, but rather of *'the right way to initiate action,'* in which passivity and emptiness are only conditions which allow divine moving; they are stages on the way to action.⁴ Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Friends were exhorted to practise Quietist retirement as the only sure means of obtaining guidance for their spiritual and temporal lives. In 1770, for example, the authors of the annual printed *Epistle* from London Yearly Meeting advised that:

The way to profit by it [i.e. Inner Light] is often to retire diligently unto it. As it appears inwardly it calls for inward retirement, and an abstraction from earthly objects, imaginations and attachments. For, in the silence of all that is of the flesh, the still small voice of truth, the divine Word nigh in the heart, is heard; and by hearing, with due observance, true faith is produced.⁵

True faith would enable individuals to act in harmony with the will of God. As Friends were assured in the 1785 *Epistle*, by obeying the convictions of the Spirit in 'the secret of your own hearts' they would 'receive wisdom to discern and strength steadily to pursue those things which make for your preservation and everlasting peace.'⁶ Friends who were receptive to the voice of God were believed to gain access to the living spring of divine wisdom and knowledge, the direct source of ultimate and immutable moral truth. This knowledge could then be applied practically as a guide to daily life. In their use of the word 'Truth' to describe

John Wesley abandoned the congregation in Fetter Lane, London, which he alleged had been led into Quietism by a Moravian preacher, Philip Molther. Wesley used this incident to justify breaking with the Moravians to whom early Methodism owed many of its patterns of devotion and discipline, but there were further minor sporadic incidents of Quietist mysticism in subsequent decades. See Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, second edition (London, 1992), pp. 203-4; Gordon Rupp, 'Introductory Essay,' in Rupert Davis and Gordon Rupp (eds.), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain: Volume I* (London, 1965), pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

⁴*LPQ*, pp. 35-6.

⁵[Society of Friends,] *Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends Held in London* (2 vols, London, 1858); ii, p. 3.

⁶*Ibid.*, p.62.

the pure Quaker way of life, Friends were signalling the conviction that their beliefs and practices all directly reflected the immediate teachings of God.

Mystical Quakerism was overwhelmingly non-doctrinal, being concerned less with the imposition of beliefs than with the cultivation of personal piety based upon obedience to the revelations which God made to the soul. The spiritual diaries and autobiographies of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Friends bear witness to the constant struggle in which they engaged to subject their wills to that of God and follow the guidance of the Inner Light. A key aspect of Friends' conversion narratives was their affirmation that the transformation had been effected completely by means of the divine Spirit within, and without any human interference. For example, Mary Stokes (later Dudley) of Bristol moved from Anglicanism via Methodism to the Society of Friends. During her conversion to Quakerism in 1773 she refused to seek any human counsel on Friends' beliefs or practices, trusting entirely to the personal direction which she received from the Inner Light. She recorded how she was thus gradually brought into fellowship with Friends:

Though ignorant of the way Friends had been led, or the peculiar testimonies they held, the day of vision clearly unfolded them one after another, so that obedience in one matter loosened the seal to opening another, until I found, as a face answered face in a glass, so did the experience of enlightened minds answer one to the other.⁷

The initial hostility which Stokes' family displayed towards her Quakerism might have made it especially important for her to confirm the purity of her conversion in this way. However, it is evident that for those from Quaker backgrounds too, the certainty that they were guided solely by the Light Within was a paramount concern. Catharine Peyton (later Phillips) of Stourbridge underwent a typical period of close personal introspection during her conversion, wrestling with doubts about the Quaker principles and practices in which she had been educated. She likened her heart to a wilderness through which she struggled, in the process being convinced of the purity of Friends' beliefs not, 'by the testimony of others, or the writings of such as have vindicated them in the world,' but 'from the deep ground of inward revelation.'⁸

The most obvious way in which the mystical basis of Quaker faith was reflected in the gender practices of the Society was in the sanction which it afforded to the ministry of women.

⁷Elizabeth Dudley (ed.), *Life of Mary Dudley* (London, 1825), pp. 19-20.

⁸[Catharine Phillips,] *Memoirs of the Life of Catharine Phillips: to which are added some of her epistles* (London, 1797), pp. 13-14.

Friends understood the Christian ministry not as a profession for which special education was required or from which a livelihood could be earned. Rather it was a free gift from God, bestowed upon those who were especially receptive and submissive to the guidance of the Inner Light. As we have seen, Quaker cosmology was based upon the identification of a fundamental split in which true knowledge of things moral and religious could be obtained only through direct revelation from God, whilst any claims to insight which had their origins in natural, human perception were essentially false. As Barclay explained, the only valid means by which anyone could be authorized to dispense the gospel was:

By the Inward Power and Virtue of the Spirit of God ... Having received the true Knowledge of things Spiritual by the Spirit of God (without which there cannot be Knowledge) he [sic] comes thereby to be called and moved to minister to others, being able to speak from a living Experience of what he himself is a witness.

All people being equally endowed with a spark of the Inner Light, irrespective of earthly distinctions, it was thus evident that, 'Rich or Poor, Servant or Master, Young or Old, yea, Male or Female,' might be moved to minister.⁹ Phyllis Mack demonstrates vividly how from the early days of the Society, women Friends denied the existence of gendered constraints in the act of preaching by insisting that they spoke as 'disembodied spirits "in the light", not as women.'¹⁰ The merely instrumental capacity in which Friends viewed their ministers, as mediums for the transmission of the will of God who transcended self and earthly limitations, allowed them to reject the notion that gender was a factor prohibiting the exercise of the gift.

With its emphasis on the universal Inner Light as the basis for equal ministering rights, the early Quaker movement has been described as representing 'the apogee of spiritual equality' between women and men among the sectarian groups which emerged during the English Civil War. Certainly many women were attracted to the Society, but contemporary suggestions that women Friends overwhelmingly outnumbered men do not appear to have had any foundation in reality. Rather, they were rumours circulated by anti-Quaker propagandists alarmed by the visible and audacious way in which seventeenth-century women Friends

⁹Barclay, *Apology*, p. 280.

¹⁰Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: ecstatic prophecy in seventeenth-century England* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 134; *idem.*, 'Gender and spirituality in early English Quakerism,' in Elizabeth Potts Brown and Susan Mosher Stuard (eds.), *Witnesses for Change: Quaker women over three centuries* (New Brunswick, 1989), pp. 31-63.

challenged prevailing assumptions about appropriate gendered behaviour.¹¹ These women produced, for example, an extensive corpus of sectarian writings in the form of prophecies, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies at a time when female intrusion into the male sphere of print culture was widely viewed as unacceptable. And they did not shrink from adopting some of the sensational methods of bearing testimonies devised by early Friends to chastise the corrupt society around.¹² The high, often confrontational, public profile of some early women Friends led to charges being levelled against Quakerism by its detractors that it was immoral and encouraged dangerous 'female enthusiasm'¹³ Friends themselves, whilst at no time arguing against women's right to preach, evinced concern about the image of the unregulated female visionary as both symbol and perpetrator of disorder in the early Quaker movement. The strategies which were developed to deal with this perceived problem contributed to the evolution of a more structured framework within which individual religious authority was exercised. Kate Peters argues that the early Quaker tracts produced in defence of women's preaching in the 1650s were designed both to legitimise the existing role of women in the movement and to limit supposedly unruly female behaviour by carefully defining the boundaries of women's action.¹⁴ Following two episodes of apparent spiritual and emotional anarchy in the late 1650s and early 1660s, which were actually led by male Friends but in which women were heavily implicated as instigators and practitioners of conspicuously excessive behaviour, George Fox and his followers perceived the need for increased structure and organization to safeguard the survival and spiritual integrity of the

¹¹Keith V. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War sects,' *Past and Present*, 13 (1958), pp. 42-62. Thomas notes that women were so visible within early Quakerism that it was rumoured by some contemporaries that the Society of Friends was exclusively female. However, Richard Vann has suggested that such rumours were concocted to exploit general fears and assumptions that a sect which espoused radical views on sexual equality would for that very reason attract wanton and immodest women bent on disrupting social order. Vann's own work on early Quaker records led him to conclude, 'I do not believe that in any area at any time before 1760 more than 55 percent of Friends were women.' Richard T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism* (Harvard, 1969), p. 83 note.

¹²Phyllis Mack observes that traditional historians of Quakerism have oddly tended to follow the path of the Society's early detractors by downplaying or ignoring the contributions which women made in shaping the intellectual, theological and intellectual life of the movement - with the single exception of the hagiographic treatment accorded to Margaret Fell - focusing instead on diverting examples of apparently outlandish female behaviour. *Visionary Women*, p. 134.

¹³One result of this accusation was that some men Friends falsely ascribed the persecution which early Friends suffered to the provocative actions of their women co-religionists. See Christine Trevett, 'The women around Janes Nayler, Quaker: a matter of emphasis,' *Religion*, 20 (1990) pp. 249-273. Trevett shows that the readiness of contemporaries to focus on women as the unstable elements in the movement obscured the reality that male displays of 'enthusiasm' were equally, if not more, present in the cult of adulation which developed around Nayler in the mid-1650s.

¹⁴Kate Peters, 'Women's Speaking Justified: women and discipline in the early Quaker movement,' *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998), pp. 205-234.

movement.¹⁵ In the process of codification, the nature of ministry was more formally defined. Margaret Fell's classic treatise *Women's Speaking Justified* (1667) which defended the ministry of women by confirming the self-transcending nature of Quaker ministry and citing scriptural texts in support of female preaching, was part of this process of regulation.¹⁶ The ministry as a whole was transformed from a loose association of preachers who spoke and travelled freely as they were moved by the Inner Light into a formally-recognized class within the Society. Friends displaying the gift for receiving and communicating divine revelation were officially acknowledged and recorded as ministers by senior members of their Meeting and their preaching was principally directed towards addressing fellow-Friends in the Meeting House. Those who were moved to hold public meetings or to travel in order to minister elsewhere required written permission from their local Meeting to do so.¹⁷

The establishment of local Meetings was a key element in the drive which Fox spearheaded for greater internal order and cohesion in the Quaker movement. Meetings were the organizational focus for Friends in a particular neighbourhood, and were bound together into a network of regional and national Meetings. Through this network it was hoped that faithfulness to the evolving Quaker discipline would be strengthened. Mutual help and encouragement would be offered between members who were responsible for monitoring one another's spiritual, moral and social behaviour and each Meeting was to select several senior male and female members to act as Elders. Whilst Elders were expected to take the lead in upholding the discipline by virtue of their experience and wisdom, all Friends theoretically had a part to play. Decision-making in the Meetings for discipline, sometimes called business Meetings, which were to be held at stated intervals at each level of the Society's organisation,¹⁸ rested on a consensual system which assumed the viability of so-called 'corporate mysticism,' that is, the attempt to fuse the apparently contradictory elements of individual mystical insight and group solidarity.¹⁹ Fox argued that women Friends, equally capable of receiving direct

¹⁵Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 265-280; *BQ*, pp. 302-342.

¹⁶Margaret Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures: all Such as Speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus* (London, 1667).

¹⁷Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 273-4; *SPQ*, pp. 541-545.

¹⁸The term 'Meeting' had two meanings in Quaker parlance. First, it denoted the local, regional and national divisions into which the Society was organized and to which individual Friends belonged depending upon their place of residence. Secondly, it described the gatherings of Friends which took place for specific purposes which were subdivided into Meetings for worship and Meetings for discipline. Meetings for discipline were further subdivided according to the sex or status of their participants, and to the exact nature of the business which they were convened to address.

¹⁹Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 278-9.

divine guidance, had an important part to play alongside their menfolk in maintaining the discipline of the Society:

being made partakers of the same precious faith and heir of the same everlasting gospel of salvation that men are [they] ought in a like manner to come into the possession and practice of the gospel order, and therein be meet-helps unto men in the restoration, in the service of truth, in the affairs of the church, as they are outwardly, in civil, or temporal things.²⁰

Fox justified the granting of disciplinary authority to women in what were explicitly gendered terms, pointing to their supposedly special female qualifications for dealing with matters relating to charity, care of the sick, marriage and the discipline of women. Moreover, he demanded that women hold Meetings for discipline separately from the men. Clearly, whilst it was believed that women could transcend the limitations imposed by their gender in the acts of worship and ministry, Fox retained a strong sense that the sexes were essentially different, and that such difference should be observed and accommodated in the work of regulating daily life.²¹ Phyllis Mack argues that this identification of women's sectarian authority with their traditional functions of nurturing and caring was a deeply radical measure, enshrining as it did the value of female authority and feminine qualities in the Society.²² As I shall discuss later in this chapter, the integration of domestic responsibilities and religious authority remained a potent image in the Quaker conception of femininity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and had implications for Friends' understanding of the meaning of gender as a whole.

It is undeniable, though, that whilst the position accorded to women in the Society's disciplinary machinery marked a radical and unique departure in terms of general contemporary practice, it placed them in a subordinate position to the men. Women were excluded from any role in the main executive bodies which wielded nationwide influence over the life of the Society: the London Yearly Meeting which exercised overall executive responsibility, the Second Day Morning Meeting which oversaw the censorship and publication of Friends' writings, and the Meeting for Sufferings which monitored Friends'

²⁰George Fox, *Journal*, sixth ed. (Leeds, 1836), p. 186.

²¹Fox advocated the system of separate meetings as he feared that modesty and propriety would impede women's readiness to undertake their share of disciplinary work if they were forced to present their cases before then men. There were, he observed, 'many things which women may do and speak of among women which are not men's business.' Quoted in Samuel Tuke, *Selections from the Epistles of George Fox*, second ed. (London, 1848), p. 142. See also *SPQ*, p. 274 note, for a similar statement.

²²Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 286-293.

relations with non-Friends, especially on legal matters. In 1700 the men's Yearly Meeting denounced the informal Meeting of women ministers which took place concurrently, asserting that they had not given the women permission to establish their Meeting, and it therefore had no official basis or disciplinary powers. Furthermore, any women wishing to bring matters before London Yearly Meeting were required to obtain prior permission to attend and were cautioned against taking up time or speaking when men also had something to contribute.²³ In some local areas too women's Meetings were suppressed by Friends who opposed the efforts of Fox and his followers to create a more organised Society, defending instead the exercise of minimal regulation on individual preaching and regarding the creation of women's Meetings as one of the more odious aspects of Fox's programme. In other localities, though, women's Monthly and Quarterly Meetings for discipline were established, largely through the personal efforts of Margaret Fell, who travelled extensively throughout the country for that purpose.²⁴ This ensured that the belief was kept alive that, albeit in a limited way, women did have a part to play in overseeing and upholding the Society's discipline.²⁵

In a sense, the subordinate status and roles which women were granted within the evolving Quaker discipline can be regarded as a typical example of the historical, cross-cultural phenomenon, recognised both by historians of women and religion and by feminist theologians, whereby the more institutionalised religious movements become, the more they marginalise women in relation to positions of power.²⁶ Yet it produces a misleading picture

²³*SPQ*, pp. 286-7; Margaret Hope Bacon, 'The establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting: a transatlantic concern,' *JFHS*, 57 (1992-3), p. 154.

²⁴Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell: mother of Quakerism* (London, 1949), pp. 283-302; Bonnelyn Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 143-168; Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 293-304. The debate over whether or not women Friends should meet separately from the men resurfaced in the mid- to late-nineteenth century as an important dimension in the wider involvement of Quakers in the struggle for women's rights. Those women who demanded an end to separation tended to be involved in the secular women's rights movement, most notably Helen Priestman Bright Clark, whilst women who supported the separate system of meetings were more concerned with the moral reforming mission of Quaker women in wider society. See, Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Offices and services: women's pursuit of sexual equality within the Society of Friends, 1873-1907,' *Quaker Studies*, 1 (1997), pp. 1-29. Interestingly in light of the above, whilst she acknowledged that it was preferable for women and men to work together, the radical American Hicksite Quaker and feminist Lucretia Mott defended the part which separate meetings had played in providing women Friends with a space in which to develop and exercise their talents. See Bacon, 'The establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting,' pp. 162-3.

²⁵This practice continued to have the support of the male executive leadership. For example, in 1707 the London Yearly Meeting *Epistle* urged, 'our women's [monthly and quarterly] meetings, being set up and approved in the love of God, and by his wisdom and power, and of manifest service, and helpful in the church, it is the earnest desire and advice of this meeting, that they may be upheld and encouraged ... where they may be the most serviceable and useful.' *Yearly Meeting Epistles*, i, p. 118.

²⁶See David Shorney, "'Women may preach but men must govern:'" gender roles in the growth and development of the Bible Christian denomination,' *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998), pp. 309-322; Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (London, 1991), especially pp. 221-237; Ursula

if we focus overwhelmingly on developments on the disciplinary side of Friends' church organisation and thence argue that overall the Society became less receptive than before to women's exercise of authority.²⁷ By retaining their belief in charismatic ministry Friends left open to women a major avenue through which they could continue to occupy positions of influence and leadership.

By the later eighteenth century a situation had evolved in which the question of the extent of women Friends' right to wield religious authority again came under scrutiny. It was summed up in 1784 by Rebecca Jones, a leading American minister then on a religious visit to Friends in England. Writing to her friend in Philadelphia, Hannah Catharall, Jones vividly described the state in which she found the Society: 'There is (however low things are in this nation respecting the discipline) a living, deep, clear ministry, and remarkably so on the women's side.'²⁸ Her comments are instructive for two main reasons. First, they hint at the numerical preponderance which women had come to assume in the Quaker ministry by this time, and secondly, they make a powerful observation on the relationship between gender and leadership in the Society, contrasting the languid condition of the (male led) discipline with the vibrant piety of the (female led) ministry. The ideas which were articulated by Friends in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries about the nature, status and roles of women in the Society need to be understood in terms of this crude disjunction along gender lines between those who exercised spiritual leadership and those who exercised disciplinary authority. Women wove often subtle gendered defences of their fitness to undertake ministerial roles and responsibilities into their writings. They focused upon and developed certain aspects of the Society's beliefs in order to underline their credibility as ministers, often in ways which exploited ideas about femininity to hint at a specific appreciation that, as women, they were especially suited to the offices of spiritual leadership. From their position of strength in the ministry, leading women Friends felt encouraged to demand a greater share in the higher echelons of the Society's disciplinary organisation, and in support of that claim they employed the gendered images of femininity through which they had safeguarded their ministerial position. The apparently superior capacity of women Friends as a group to act as divine mediums emerged as a problematic issue for the Society's male executive leadership.

King, *Women and Spirituality: voices of protest and promise* (London, 1993), p. 37.

²⁷Patricia Crawford seems to suggest that this was the case, contending that the increasingly rigid disciplinary structure which the Society forged during the eighteenth century, and the replacing of ecstatic with Quietist worship, marginalised women Friends within their community: *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1700* (London, 1993), pp. 193-7.

²⁸William J. Allison (ed.), *Memorials of Rebecca Jones*, second ed. (London, 1848), p. 63.

The gendered representation of women's religious authority

Writing about their experiences in the ministry, women Friends vividly described the struggles which they underwent in the quest to subdue the self and act in perfect obedience to God when they were inwardly moved to preach. For example, Ruth Follows of Castle Donnington, who first experienced the call to ministry in 1747 when she was nearly thirty, recalled in her spiritual autobiography:

oh! the exercise this brought upon me, for I found self was yet for being pleased, and I was not willing to be counted a fool, and was for being almost any thing so that the Lord would be pleased without this, that I might not become a gazing-stock to the world: but the more I strove against it, the heavier was my exercise; and the Lord was pleased to afflict me in a wonderful manner, which bowed my soul even to the earth, and in the midst of this trouble I was made to cry in the bitterness of my poor afflicted soul, 'Oh, Lord, make me what thou wouldst have me be.'²⁹

Susanna Boone believed that she was required to speak during a morning meeting for worship in 1774, but recorded, 'my natural timorousness got the better of me to the neglect of my duty.' In the afternoon meeting later that day, she again felt inward prompting to preach, 'which I at length gave up to, but it seemed doubly hard work. That I was but more passive in my great Master's hand.'³⁰ Similarly, Lydia Hill, recounting her feelings on being moved to speak in a Meeting in 1785, wrote, 'I was almost ready to sink away - *death* appeared desirable indeed! My natural life seemed taken away from me - yet I believe it to be permitted for the tryal of my faith.'³¹

The experience of suffering made evident the struggle taking place for mortification of the self. Obeying the divine will and bearing a public testimony to God inevitably meant being called on to do things from which one naturally shrank in fear. However, suffering also taught resignation, as obedience in turn brought inner peace, and thereby strengthened faith. Jane Pearson of Carlisle recorded that she endured nine months of mental anguish before she was able to preach a few lines in the late 1750s, but when she finally submitted:

I had great peace of mind, so that instead of my heart being a place for dragons ... there

²⁹Samuel Stansfield (ed), *Memoirs of Ruth Follows, late of Castle Donnington, Leicestershire: for sixty years a minister in the Society of Friends* (Liverpool, 1829), p. 16.

³⁰'Diaries of Susanna Boone, 1731-1789,' vol. 1, 13/12/1774. QWD reel 1.

³¹'Lydia Hill's Diary, 1780-5,' 17/7/1775. QWD reel 3.

began to be a melody in my heart, as it were the voice of the Son of God. ... I had now frequently to speak in meetings, and had satisfaction in so doing.³²

Mary Alexander of Suffolk described how during a morning Meeting for worship in 1789 she resisted the inner prompting to speak, but in the afternoon Meeting the same day she again experienced the command and preached for the first time. As a result of this obedience she felt 'full of peace,' and in her mind she underwent a 'transition from tribulation to joy.'³³

For ministering Friends, undergoing and recording their passage through this purifying process of suffering and resignation was deeply important. When Friends spoke or acted under the guidance of the Inner Light, they transcended human forms of identity and gave utterance not as women or men, but channels for the voice of God. Mary Dudley described how when she spoke, 'the words impressing my mind seemed to run through me as a passive vessel.'³⁴ Sarah Tuke asserted that to be an effective minister it was necessary to be unequivocally 'instrumental in the divine hand.'³⁵ Acting literally as the mouthpiece of God was a monumental responsibility, and Friends needed to be certain that their ministry did not contain any defiling human input. Having no official system of training and ordination, ministering Friends had to be able to reassure both themselves and their hearers that they were acting solely in response to inner guidance. As the Quaker ministry became more ordered from the late seventeenth century onwards, a consensual system of sectarian devices evolved through which Friends could assess with precision the intangible substance of divine inspiration and the spiritual fitness of those who claimed to be acting under it. For example, the language, deportment and aura of the speaker would be scrutinised.³⁶ Within the context of this shared

³²Thomas Wilkinson (ed), *Sketches of Piety in the Life and Religious Experiences of Jane Pearson: extracted from her own memorandums* (York, 1818), pp. 29-30.

³³ [Mary Alexander,] *Some Account of the Life and Religious Experiences of Mary Alexander* (York, 1811), pp. 26-7.

³⁴*Life of Mary Dudley*, p. 24.

³⁵ [Sarah (Tuke) Grubb,] *Some Account of the Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb*, second ed. (London, 1796), p. 107.

³⁶The suggestion made by Elise Boulding that, 'Quakerism had no specific practices and literature dictating spiritual development,' is clearly not accurate. Elise Boulding, 'Mapping the inner journey of Quaker women,' in Carol Stoneburner and John Stoneburner (eds.) *The Influence of Quaker Women in American History: biographical studies* (New York, 1986) p. 83. The close collective identity of the Society meant that its members were all well acquainted with the parameters and patterns of accepted development. Within this context, ideas about the physical and emotional spectacle of genuine ministry were highly developed. For example, in 1798 the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders sent printed 'Advices' to the local Select Meetings which warned their members against inappropriate practices such as, 'using unnecessary Preamble, and laying too great stress on their Testimony, by too positively asserting a Divine Motion. The baptising power of the Truth accompanying the Motion is the best evidence.' They were also to avoid, 'unbecoming Tones, Sounds, Gesture and

cultural standard against which authentic ministry could be measured, the process of suffering during the sacrifice of the human will was the recognised blueprint for emotional experience through which the individual would pass on being brought into direct communion with God. Fledgling ministers became acquainted with the process through the writings of exemplary Friends and their personal intercourse with more experienced ministers. In turn, their own experience of these emotions at first hand, and the observation of them by other Friends, either personally, through letters, or in contemporary or posthumous reports, served to confirm the validity of their call. Emotional turmoil was one way in which the transforming work of God in the soul found practical expression.

Accounts of suffering surrounding the work of ministry were not exclusive to women's writings. James Backhouse of Darlington, for example, described how his natural inclination was to shrink from making a 'public offering' and he always ministered in great fear.³⁷ However, it is evident from the comparative study of male and female authored sources that women not only dwelt in far greater detail than men did on the suffering aspect of their own experiences in the ministry, but that they also often gave expositions of a more general nature on the concept of suffering as a necessary trial to be endured by ministers. In 1778, for example, Sarah Tuke reflected that her struggles to subdue her own will had taught her that submitting unreservedly to follow the guidance of the Inner Light was necessarily the 'path of suffering,' because God's followers were not to be taken out of the world, but rather preserved from evil within it. Such a life subjected the righteous to 'the cross and the flames' of hardship and ridicule, from which many recoiled who were not perfectly resigned.³⁸ Sarah Lynes Grubb reflected that as the gift of ministry had grown in her, 'much baptism and suffering was my portion' but that she was able to bear these trials as they brought her closer to God. She continued, 'I have never known an easier way to find favour with the Lord of life and glory, than that of passive submission to all His holy will concerning me, even under dispensations so mortifying and proving to the fleshly mind.'³⁹ When Tabitha Hoyland of Sheffield was depressed by doubts and fears in the early months of her ministry in 1775, her aunt Esther Tuke reassured her that, 'the baptism of suffering [is] for the purification and

Affectations, which are not agreeable to Christian gravity.' Minute Book of the Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of Ministers and Elders, vol i (21.vi.1689 - 26.vi.1798), p. 358, mf162, BIHR.

³⁷S Backhouse (ed.), *Memoir of James Backhouse* (York, 1870), pp. 12-13.

³⁸*Life of Sarah Grubb*, p. 10.

³⁹[Sarah Lynes Grubb,] *A selection from the Letters of Sarah Grubb, formerly Sarah Lynes* (Sudbury, 1848), p. 3.

fitting to the work allotted.’⁴⁰

Catharine Phillips articulated the central place of suffering in the Quaker religious experience when she observed that she had seldom, if ever, seen a minister of real usefulness, ‘whose foundations have not been deeply laid in afflictions and exercises, whereby they are crucified with Christ and shall therefore rise with him to glory and honour in the present as well as a future state.’⁴¹ As Phillips’s remarks suggest, Friends believed that it was possible for the truly obedient to know freedom from sin in this world. Suffering was the first step on the path towards achieving a state of perfect resignation to the divine will comparable to that of Christ.⁴² She observed that Christ, like contemporary Friends, ‘had to bear the contradictions of sinners, and no doubt, in the course of his ministry, felt the oppressive weight of contrary and wicked spirits, as the members of his church now do in their measure.’⁴³ In a similar way Mary Alexander too identified her condition with that of Christ. On her conversion in 1783 at the age of 23 she recorded that, ‘it was given me to see ... I also must bear Him who “bore the cross, despising the shame,” and must experience a willingness wrought in my heart, to fill up my measure of suffering for the precious cause.’⁴⁴ For women Friends such as these, in crucifying their own will in order to fulfil the will of God they shared in the suffering of, and indeed became like, Christ.⁴⁵

In deploying the language of suffering to affirm their fitness for the offices of spiritual leadership, women Friends were exploiting a tradition of thought within Quakerism about the natural constitutional weakness of women, the heritage of which can be traced back to the seventeenth century.⁴⁶ Belief in the ungendered Inner Light did not prevent Friends from holding ideas about the ministry based on assumptions of physical sexual difference. Whilst

⁴⁰Esther Tuke to Tabitha Hoyland, 20/7/1775. MS Box T (45), FHL.

⁴¹*Memoirs of Catharine Phillips*, p. 17.

⁴²Robert Barclay laid out this thesis of perfectibility describing how, on obeying the Inner Light, individuals would have to suffer God’s judgements upon their natural will, but in bearing this judgement they would be ‘brought forth unto Victory; and be made *Comfortable unto his Death*, that thou mayst feel thyself *Crucified with him to the World, by the Power of the Cross in Thee.*’ *Apology*, p. 254.

⁴³*Memoirs of Catharine Phillips*, p.239.

⁴⁴[Mary Alexander,] *Some Account of the Life and Religious Experiences of Mary Alexander* (York, 1811) p. 19.

⁴⁵The identification of women with Christ’s suffering humanity has been recognised as an important aspect in the devotional emphasis of other groups of female mystics, such as mediaeval saints practising food asceticism. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the religious significance of food to mediaeval women* (London, 1987), pp. 27 and 120.

⁴⁶Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 172-3

on the surface an essentialism which stressed female weakness might seem negative, in the context of Friends' beliefs it could make women appear especially suitable media for the transmission of God's will. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, women's apprehension and articulation of their natural mental and physical impotence is a recurrent theme in their writings. Assessing her activities in the ministry, Lydia Hill described herself as 'a poor weak creature,' who was 'perhaps one of the weakest that was ever called to so *Great Work*.'⁴⁷ Sarah Stephenson of Whitehaven first experienced the inward call to minister in 1763, but recalled in her memoirs that, 'I saw myself such a poor creature, and the work so awfully great, that I did not give up to it [for] two years ... nor until sore trials made me willing.'⁴⁸ Invoking an explicitly gendered self-image of weakness following a particularly trying period of itinerant ministry, Mary Dudley wrote to her husband Robert: 'Thou hardly expected thy poor, trembling wife would ever be strengthened to move in such a line.'⁴⁹ Such acknowledgements had important implications for women's exercise of religious authority. As we have seen, the role of the Quaker ministry was not to further the aims and ambitions of the individual minister, but to reveal directly to others the will of God, and show the power and glory of the divine. Esther Tuke made this point when writing to her niece Tabitha Hoyland. She described how the transforming work of the Spirit of God in the heart would enable

the weak to say 'I am strong,' thro that power which is yet able to furnish with the sling and the stone, and by the low, the poor and the contemptible in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, work deliverance.⁵⁰

By raising up as divine instruments those who in natural life appeared to be the poorest, weakest, most unlikely candidates, God's power was demonstrated in an especially striking manner. And of course, it was primarily women who were regarded in this way. The gendered nature of the self-transcendence which was required for the performance of authentic ministry was articulated in the following advice given to Deborah Wilson of Kendal by Thomas Bownas shortly after her ministering gift became apparent. He warned her to be sure to look only to the guidance of the Inner Light in order that, 'Thou in the Gallery may appear

⁴⁷'Lydia Hill's Diary,' 7/7/1785.

⁴⁸[Sarah Stephenson,] *Memoirs of the Life and Travels in the Service of the Gospel of Sarah Stephenson* (London, 1807), p. 13.

⁴⁹*Life of Mary Dudley*, p. 104.

⁵⁰Esther Tuke to Tabitha Hoyland, MS Box T 3/2, p. 55, FHL..

in the beauty of the Spirit, without any mixture of the Creature, the Flesh, the weak & womanish part which in both Sexes ought never to appear uncovered to speak in the Congregation of the Saints'⁵¹ Covering up the 'weak and womanish' part clearly demanded something different from women than it did from men, as the natural traits associated with femininity were perceived to be utterly at odds with the exercise of divine ministry. Only those women would be able to exercise the gift whose submission to God and annihilation of the self were so absolute that fundamental characteristics which defined them humanly were dissolved.

The suffering to which women's natural weakness subjected them during the conflict taking place between the human and divine wills could be demonstrated particularly vividly when it was linked to incidents of actual physical illness. One of the most striking accounts of this type of suffering is provided by Martha Routh. She resisted the call to preach until she was so ill that she became bed-ridden, and her family feared for her life. Martha directly linked her illness to her disobedience to God, telling her sister

my sickness is not designed by the great Physician of value for the body; if that would have been accepted as a peace offering, thankfully could I have resigned it; but resignation of will to the Divine will, in a way more trying to my nature, is what is required, and what I have been struggling under till I am brought thus low.

She begged her sister and friends to pray to God to help her. Soon after this show of faithfulness she recovered, having promised God that she would be obedient in future, if called.⁵² When Mary Dudley underwent her conversion to Quakerism in 1773, she too had a life-threatening illness. Her inner struggles were tortuous, but when she had finally subjected her own will sufficiently to use 'plain' Quaker language to her Anglican mother, her health was restored. Mary explained the incident in terms of God's intervention to show her the path she must take: 'the source of light and life, to finish His own work, saw meet to deprive me of my health.'⁵³

There is also material which indicates that the period of exclusively female vulnerability surrounding childbirth, with its physical ordeal and potentially fatal outcome, was interpreted by some women as a time when they were especially susceptible to divine

⁵¹Reynolds MSS p. 245, FHL. The 'Gallery' refers to the Meeting House galleries in which ministers sat during Meetings for worship.

⁵²*Memoir of Martha Routh*, pp. 25-7.

⁵³*Life of Mary Dudley*, pp. 18-19.

influence. After the birth of her sixth child Elizabeth Fry recorded in her diary, 'Though, no doubt, weakness brings many pains and trials, yet at times, there is that to be felt which makes up for them all, a nearer taste of perfect peace than I think I enjoy when nature is strong.'⁵⁴ Barbara Hoyland of Sheffield converted to Quakerism from Anglicanism. Her conversion was a protracted process, but her faith was confirmed after the birth of her second son. She wrote, 'Being brought to the verge of the grave at that time, I was put upon close examination whether something, little or much, that had been required, stood in the way of acceptance with my heavenly Father'.⁵⁵ The physical suffering which Quaker women underwent explicitly showed the process through which the death of the creature was effected: their natural selves were being brought into submission as God worked through their frail bodies to discipline their souls.

I have found only one account of a male Friend describing extreme physical illness being used by God in this way to bring him into submission, in the *Journal* of the American minister, John Woolman.⁵⁶ Whilst I do not want to dismiss the importance of these examples, I think in many ways, John Woolman can be regarded as the exception who proves the rule that male ministers did not interpret, or at least did not choose to represent, personal physical weakness as a route to greater spirituality. Woolman was highly revered in the Society for his humble and saintly piety, but viewed too as an extreme, somewhat eccentric ascetic in his observation of religious testimonies. Woolman's focus on his own frailty was not a typical emphasis for male ministers, whereas this stress was a characteristic theme in the writings of women Friends.

Women's articulation of extreme forms of mental and corporeal suffering and the linking of periods of particular physical weakness to their struggles to subject themselves fully to God's will, helps to explain their emergence and acceptance as leading ministers in the Society. The image of the naturally frail woman transformed into an effective agent of God when divine power enabled her to transcend the enfeebling limitations of her gender was one which women ministers into the nineteenth century continued to appropriate. Some of the most influential and respected women preachers apparently revelled in their own weakness as a means of demonstrating God's power. Ann Mercy Bell of York recorded that at a public

⁵⁴*Memoirs of the Life of Elizabeth Fry, with Extracts from her Journal and Letters* (2 vols, London, 1847), i, p. 142.

⁵⁵'Memoirs of the life of Barbara Hoyland, addressed to her children,' F.H.L. MS Box Q 4/1, p. 77

⁵⁶[John Woolman,] *A Journal of the Life, Gospel Labours and Christian Experience of that Faithful Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, John Woolman* (London, 1824), pp. 231-2.

meeting in Thaxted at which she and her companions preached, 'Many sober People, some women, seem far much affected with hearing the Gospel preached thro' the weaker Vessel.'⁵⁷ At the northern yearly meeting in 1757, Catharine Phillips observed that, although there were several able male ministers present, 'it pleased the wise Master of the solemnity to employ them but little, and to lay the weight of the service upon the females, who although the weaker vessels by nature, are at times strengthened through his divine power.'⁵⁸

The collective appeal which women Friends found in the images of their suffering humanity is underlined by the way in which the language of suffering also became, in a sense, the language of female solidarity. Particularly among those who engaged in the travelling ministry, the support network of other itinerant women was a source of encouragement and strength. Shared experiences of suffering were often depicted as the ties which bound them together. In the 1790s, for example, Sarah Lynes Grubb undertook her first itinerant ministry, travelling extensively throughout England. For much of the time she was accompanied by Anne Baker, and recalled that in the course of the journey, 'We passed through many tribulations together, which, as well as experiencing some rejoicings, had a strong tendency to unite us in true sisterly love and friendship.'⁵⁹ In a similar vein, Mary Capper of Birmingham reflected on the close bond which had developed between herself and Mary Beesley. On the occasion of the latter's marriage and removal to Wales in 1802 Capper wrote in her journal:

Took leave of my endeared friend, endeared by often suffering together, and being helped by that which passes all the efforts of self. The fellowship of suffering is a mystery to the understanding of the creature, but I believe opens lessons of true wisdom to the resigned, dedicated follower of a crucified Redeemer.⁶⁰

The 'fellowship of suffering' transcended earthly friendships. It was the supernatural union of two souls, united by their shared struggle for communion with God.

Through a compelling range of gendered images which turned on the themes of suffering and weakness, women Friends confirmed their right to exercise spiritual authority in the Society through the ministry. However, as was indicated above, this influential capacity in the ministry was not reflected in the official status and roles which women were accorded

⁵⁷Ann Mercy Bell, 'Journal and Correspondence, 1745-1786', mf 173, BIHR.

⁵⁸*Life of Catharine Phillips*, p. 156.

⁵⁹*Letters of Sarah Grubb*, p. 4.

⁶⁰Katherine Backhouse (ed.), *A Memoir of Mary Capper* (London, 1847), p. 125.

through Quakerism's disciplinary structure. The emergence of women as the guiding force in the ministry during the eighteenth century exposed a tension in the Society's attitudes towards gender. In crude terms, it meant that there was a division between those who exercised spiritual and those who exercised disciplinary leadership which appeared to conflict with Friends' professed beliefs that pure, authentic and moral judgement could only be exercised in any area of life by those who had immediate knowledge of the divine will. The increasingly contradictory status of ministering women Friends fuelled debate towards the end of the century about the relationship between gender and authority in the church. And in this debate, women Friends drew on a heritage which stressed suffering and self-sacrifice as a means of securing God's blessing, both to defend their own position and to construct a critique of the claims to ultimate executive leadership made by the male branch of the Society's disciplinary organisation.

It is apparent that from at least the 1740s many leading women ministers regarded their exclusion from the higher levels of the Society's executive as a cause for concern. During the eighteenth century Quakerism suffered substantial numerical decline, a fall estimated from about 60,000 members in 1680 to about 16,000 in 1840. Projected reasons for this drop in numbers include the readiness with which delinquent members were disowned, emigration and the end of missionary preaching.⁶¹ For eighteenth-century Friends themselves, though, there could only be one reason for this widespread decline: the failure on the part of individual Friends to keep close to the guidance of the Inner Light and a consequent drift into worldliness. Ministering women not surprisingly saw the lack of a properly established national Meeting for overseeing discipline among women, which could monitor and encourage Meetings at regional and local levels, as a glaring breach in the Society's spiritual defences. Among the papers of the Box Meeting, a London-wide women's charitable Meeting, is a copy letter to the national Yearly Meeting dated 1746, and signed by half a dozen leading women Friends. They argue that the Society has suffered considerable loss due to the lack of a women's Yearly Meeting as, 'for want of top or Cornerstone of the building, the whole is defective.'⁶² There is no record of the men's response to this request, nor indeed any evidence of a reply. In 1765 the women Friends who had gathered together unofficially at the time of

⁶¹Joseph Stephenson Rowntree, *Quakerism, Past and Present: being an enquiry into the causes of its decline in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1859); Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, p. xxv.

⁶²'Box Meeting Minutes (1747-98)' vol i, 1748-60, mf 484, FHL. Also quoted in Bacon, 'The establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting,' pp. 154-5. The Box Meeting was one of the oldest women's Meetings in the Society, and provided the main forum in London for women to discuss their disciplinary role prior to the establishment of their Yearly Meeting. See Irene L. Edwards, 'The women Friends of London: the Two Weeks and Box Meetings,' *JFHS*, 47 (1955), pp. 3-21.

London Yearly Meeting proposed that their meeting be formally recognised and authorised to correspond annually with the women's Quarterly Meetings. The proposal was put before the men at Yearly Meeting for their concurrence, but after deferred deliberation was rejected the following year. In the minute which records their receipt of the news the women's frustration is palpable.⁶³

After nearly forty years of requesting, and in response to increasing pressure from reformers from both Britain and America seeking to strengthen Quaker discipline, women Friends were finally granted permission to hold their own official Yearly Meeting in 1784. The Meeting was to receive delegates from the regional women's Quarterly Meetings in order to monitor the state of the female part of the Society across the country and to send back to the Quarterly Meetings an epistle containing censure, advice and encouragement.⁶⁴ The event was recorded triumphantly as an important milestone in the journals of many prominent women Friends of the day.⁶⁵ It was envisaged that the presence of a properly-constituted Yearly Meeting would act to stimulate women to take a full part in upholding Society discipline. Sarah Tuke Grubb, who was clerk to the women's Meeting in 1786, hoped that it would be able to fulfil a 'profound service' to the Society as a whole by

introducing women Friends, more generally than heretofore, into an exercise on their own, their families', and the churches account; for want of which, great declension from the virtue of true religion, and the simplicity it leads into, has long lamentably spread among us as a people. And since ... a women's yearly meeting is established, and for these two last years has been regularly opened in correspondence with the several quarterly meetings, in order more deeply to enter into the state of society, as it is seen in the truth, a necessity was evidently discovered from meeting to meeting for the friends to increase their acquaintance with the light, which only makes manifest, and without which our judgement is exceedingly impaired.⁶⁶

But from the outset the men's Meeting assumed the right to define the power limits of the women's Meeting's, emphasising that its status was both subordinate and dependent. It was to be, 'a Meeting for Record ... not so far considered a Meeting for Discipline as to make rules, nor yet alter the present Queries, without the consent of this Meeting.'⁶⁷ At fairly regular

⁶³'Minutes of the Yearly Meeting of Women Friends (1784-1907),' vol. i, 1759-1785,' mf 840, FHL.

⁶⁴See Bacon, 'The establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting,' pp. 151-65.

⁶⁵*Memoirs of Catharine Phillips*, p. 289; *Memoirs of Martha Routh*, p. 44.

⁶⁶*Life of Sarah Grubb*, pp. 123-4.

⁶⁷'Minutes of Women's Yearly Meeting vol. 1.'

intervals thereafter minutes were sent from the men's to the women's Meeting reaffirming this hierarchy. In 1790, perhaps in response to the numerical preeminence of women in the ministry, the men's Meeting decreed that no Quarterly Meeting was to send more representatives to the women's Meeting than it did to the men's.⁶⁸ Two years later the subordinate role of the women's Meeting was underlined in a minute on 'The nature and extent of women's discipline'. Its nature was 'to come up to the help of their brethren in the discipline of the church,' whilst its extent was to care for the female poor, and to apply to the men for the means to do so,⁶⁹ being kept in a position of financial dependency.

The establishment of the women's Yearly Meeting was an ambiguous step. On the one hand, it appears to defy the usual tendency identified by historians and sociologists of religion and gender in that women actually gained roles of formally recognised authority at a time of increasing denominational organisation. On the other hand, the institution of the women's Meeting in a thoroughly subordinate capacity to the men's enunciated in an official way a link between gender and the right to exercise certain forms of sectarian authority, a link which carried the potential to undermine the substantial influence which women were able to assume in the Society through the ministry. From their contradictory position of official subordination women Friends drew on their most powerful collective weapon, their proven spiritual ability, to affirm their right to occupy a leading place in the Society, often doing so in the setting of the Yearly Meeting itself. When describing their own Yearly Meetings, women stressed the evidence which they found of God's blessing on the gathering. In 1795, for example, the epistle sent out to the local Meetings recorded, 'with such as have been collected for the support of our Christian Discipline, the help of the spirit hath been felt by some of us in the sweetly cementing bond of religious fellowship.'⁷⁰ Mary Waring recorded in her journal during the Yearly Meeting of 1792: 'I never felt the divine covering more evidently spread over a meeting [than] soon after our first sitting down, so that many were broken into tears before a word was spoken.'⁷¹ Similarly, in 1827, Sarah Lynes Grubb wrote to a friend that:

It seems to me that our Women's [Yearly] Meeting has increased in weight ... [I]f I am favoured with anything of the true discerning, the Great Master is pleased to bless the

⁶⁸'Minutes of Women's Yearly Meeting vol. 2,' p. 101.

⁶⁹'Minutes of London Yearly Meeting, 1791-1800,' pp. 116-9, mf 42, FHL

⁷⁰'Copies of epistles from Women's Yearly Meetings of London and Philadelphia,' mf 163, BIHR.

⁷¹[Mary Waring] *A Diary of the Religious Experiences of Mary Waring, daughter of Elijah and Sarah Waring, late of Godalming* (London, 1810), p. 57.

united exercise of those who are engaged in a secret travail after the ancient and everlasting life of truth, so that the well springs up again and again, to the watering of the flock.⁷²

Remarks such as these indicate how important women Friends felt it was to confirm that their Meetings were taking place under divine direction. The following incident, recorded by Anna Price at the Yearly Meeting in 1793, helps us further to appreciate why women found such confirmations necessary. She and Martha Routh had been deputed to attend the Men's Meeting, as was customary, where two of their brethren spoke encouragingly to them. On returning to their own Meeting, though:

We were followed out of meeting by a certain young man, who was fearful we should be too much set up, and convey too much encouragement to Women's Meetings. He spoke to M.R., who was a match for him, I said nothing, but was profoundly sensible that the life which was in Christ, and may also be in us, was not so in dominion in the Men's Meeting as I thought we had witnessed it. Painful is the jealousy of the Men Friends.⁷³

In an effort to counter the challenge of male 'jealousy' in an environment in which they were denied access to the higher echelons of disciplinary authority some leading women Friends were prepared to hint at the relative superiority of their sex as a group in spiritual matters. As we have seen, women ministers described how they experienced in intimate and tortuous ways the transforming work of God in their lives. They also pointed out, sometimes quite literally, the failure which they perceived in men Friends to undergo the sufferings necessary to effect such a transformation. Abigail Pimm, for example, visited the men's Yearly Meeting in 1811 where she told them that the reason they were outnumbered in the ministry was their unwillingness to undergo the 'preparative babtizms [*sic*]' which were required before 'the vessel is suitable to retain the wine and oil of the Kingdom.'⁷⁴ Sarah Lynes Grubb made several visits of this kind. In 1814, for instance, she expressed the opinion that there were many taking part in the meeting, 'who had not experienced the necessary babtizms [*sic*], or those cleansing renovating operations, which may be compared to washing

⁷²*Letters of Sarah Grubb*, p.23.

⁷³[Society of Friends,] *Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, 1789-1833: being the notes of Richard Cockin, supplemented by those of James Jenkins and others* (London, 1929), p. 36; Godlee, 'The Women's Meeting,' p. 113; Bacon, 'The establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting,' pp. 160-1.

⁷⁴Cockin *Pen Pictures*, p. 131.

in the Jordan, the river of judgement and purification.’⁷⁵

By suggesting that many of their male co-religionist were failing to achieve the level of suffering and self-sacrifice necessary to perform God’s work, women Friends tapped into a negative current of thinking troubling the Society about the devotedness of Quaker men. To act according to the will of God required humility: a humbling of oneself both inwardly to submit to the forming power of the divine will, and outwardly to bear the scorn and detraction of the world. Yet to some observers it seemed that men Friends were more concerned to pursue earthly than spiritual rewards. James Jenkins, an eye-witness at the debate which sanctioned the establishment of the women’s Yearly Meeting who was sympathetic to the women’s cause, made a similar point about what he perceived to be the worldly pride and vanity of some men Friends. Those who opposed the move did so, he asserted, because, they recognised that, ‘the women were the best part of our Society, and ... could not consent that the “Lords of the Creation” should be thus sunk in the scale of human estimation.’⁷⁶ In 1807 Sarah Lynes Grubb challenged the delegates to men’s Yearly Meeting to consider whether they were, ‘not more solicitous to have their heads stored with knowledge and their purses with money than they were to have their hearts replenished with heavenly treasure.’⁷⁷ When she again visited the men in 1820, Grubb saw more evidence of a worldly spirit, and warned them that, ‘the will, wisdom and activity of the creature cannot promote the cause of righteousness.’⁷⁸

Deploying contrasting images of female suffering and sacrifice on the one hand with male tendency towards self-aggrandizement on the other was credible within the Society not only because it played upon the notion of women’s natural weakness and frailty, but also because it subtly exploited strands of thought present within Friends’ broader conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity. Exploring the ways in which the inner spiritual lives of women and men were represented in relation to their wider gendered spheres of responsibility illuminates both women’s potential to appear spiritually superior - and hence helps to explain their preeminence in the ministry - and the problematic association of men with worldliness.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 160.

Gender, daily life and religious responsibilities

The acceptance that gifted Quaker women had the right and duty to exercise the full range of spiritual leadership functions as well as a unique if limited role to play in denominational administration did not exist in a vacuum. It was one component in a comprehensive denominational system of beliefs about natures and roles of women and men and the ideal relations between them which shaped Friends' distinctive interpretation of the meaning of gender across everyday life. Whilst Friends argued that earthly gender identities could and should be transcended in the personal fulfilment of duty to God, they nevertheless measured the devotedness of women and men in the performance of their religious duties in terms of the gendered roles which they conventionally undertook in daily life. Spiritual life for women was balanced against their attachment to home and family, whilst for men it was balanced against their conduct in business and trade. Further, in describing the character and conduct demanded of faithful Friends, it was suggested not only that there was little difference between the behaviour appropriate to both sexes, but also that those qualities which were esteemed as exemplary were traditionally associated with the 'feminine'.

Understanding the ways in which Friends thought about domestic and familial relationships is vital in order to appreciate the implications of juxtaposing women's religious duties with the personal ties of home and kin. By about the middle of the eighteenth century the Quaker family and household were regarded as crucial twin bulwarks in the struggle to maintain the membership and spiritual vitality of the movement in the face of substantial numerical decline. They were to function as key sites in which Friends' peculiar beliefs and practices would be upheld and perpetuated. Disowning those who married contrary to the Society's rules and the introduction of birthright membership were both devices explicitly designed to retain and cultivate the Quaker 'remnant' via family formation and domestic discipline.⁷⁹

The cornerstone of Friends' family formation was, of course, marriage. The Society's attitudes towards marriage had been framed by the egalitarian ideals of George Fox. He

⁷⁹The Society's marriage rules were primarily designed to prevent Friends from marrying non-Friends. However, as the only non-Anglican Christian denomination whose ceremony remained legal after the 1753 Marriage Act, they also disallowed marriage between Friends under the rites of the Church of England. Friends might be tempted to by-pass their own denomination's ceremony because, for example, they were first cousins (between whom the Society forbade marriage) or because they did not wish to undergo the lengthy and public process of investigation into their private affairs which Quaker practice demanded. Marriage against Society rules had been a cause of censure since the first days of the Quaker movement for its reliance on 'hireling priests,' although the use of punitive measures against delinquents appears to have become more rigorous during the eighteenth century. Birthright membership for the children of Friends was officially introduced in 1777, although this was probably little more than a formal recognition of accepted practice.. *SPQ*, pp. 234-5, 459.

contended that women and men were originally created equal and the subsequent subordination of women to men occurred as a result of the Fall. The coming of Christ had opened the way for redemption from this lapsarian state of inequality. Men and women who underwent the 'new birth' were restored to their original equal status, and marriage between two regenerate individuals brought this Edenic equality to its highest perfection. Fox described the marriage of Friends as a symbol of 'the Church's coming up out of the wilderness.'⁸⁰ Inequality was an aberration, the product of and punishment for sin. The Society's simply-worded wedding ceremony devolved no special, gendered rights or duties upon either party, and claimed to represent the union effected by God between Adam and Eve.⁸¹ It should be stressed, though, that Friends were not suggesting that marriage in society as a whole was a perfectly equal union; their analysis only applied to those relationships which took place between converted and committed Friends.⁸² During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries this selectively egalitarian perspective continued to inform Friends' ideas about marriage. In 1777 the *Yearly Meeting Epistle* contained a lengthy advice on the subject of marriage. It was described as a divine ordinance based on equality and partnership between the spouses which had been decreed

for the mutual assistance and comfort of both sexes, that they might be meet-helps to each other, both in spirituals and temporals; and that their endeavours might be united for the pious and proper education of their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.⁸³

Husband and wife were to work together to cultivate the family unit as a spiritual as well as a physical entity.

When Friends articulated their ideas and expectations about courtship and matrimony, understanding of sexuality was expressed in profoundly spiritual terms. Sexual attraction was not explained as the physical appeal of one body to another, but rather as the connection of two

⁸⁰Quoted in Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, p. 16.

⁸¹Friends simply vowed, 'to take this my Friend [name] to be my husband/wife, promising through divine assistance to be unto him/her a loving, faithful wife/husband, until it shall please the Lord by death to separate us.' Quoted in Wright, *Friends in York*, p. 58. For a discussion of Fox's views on marriage see Jacques Tual, 'Sexual equality and conjugal harmony: the way to celestial bliss. A view of early Quaker matrimony,' *JFHS*, 55 (19/8), pp. 161-174.

⁸²The feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether uses the term 'eschatological feminism' to describe the belief held by mystical groups such as Quakers in the restored equality of women and men who belong to the 'chosen' church which has transcended the restraints and conventions of 'the world.' See Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: towards a feminist theology*, fourth ed. (London, 1992), pp. 97-102.

⁸³*Yearly Meeting Epistles*, ii, p. 31.

regenerate souls which had been guided towards each other by God via the Light within each. For example, Sarah Lynes wrote to John Grubb before their marriage, 'I trust at times I feel thee near in that which is of a more exalted nature than what is felt in the affectionate part, and which is more binding than any outward ties.'⁸⁴ Reflecting in later life on their union, Sarah recorded that she had no doubt that, 'Divine Wisdom pointed out the suitableness and propriety of our becoming each other's.'⁸⁵ Ruth Follows wrote of her attraction and subsequent marriage to her husband, George: 'I can truly say that it was because he was so well-inclined [i.e. spiritually inclined] that I had so much love for him as to have him for my husband, and it was our concern first to seek "the Kingdom of God".'⁸⁶ Catharine Phillips described her marriage as, 'superior to nature,' although she acknowledged that, 'nature had its share in it.'⁸⁷ Men Friends too used spiritual language to describe sexual attraction, as the following extract from the journal of Thomas Shillitoe of London demonstrates:

Believing it would be to my advantage every way to change my condition in life, I besought the Lord to guide me by his counsel in my taking this very momentous step, and I thought I had good ground to believe he was pleased to grant my request, and pointed out to me one who was to be my companion for life, Mary Pace, a virtuous woman of honest parents, to whom in due time I made proposal of marriage, and in the Seventh month 1778, we were united in the solemn covenant of marriage.⁸⁸

Similarly, William Forster wrote to Anna Buxton shortly before their marriage of his fervent hope that they were receiving one another as the gift of God, and enjoyed the blessing of divine love.⁸⁹

The reasons for this spiritualization of the language of sexuality by Friends lie in the Quietist, mystical basis of their beliefs. Maintaining that nothing of value could come of 'the creature' they had to elevate sexual attraction onto a spiritual plane, where it would cease to be merely a natural passion. Representing mutual love between a man and a woman as the obedient responses of two souls to the directions of God made manifest via the Light within

⁸⁴*Letters of Sarah Grubb*, p. 113.

⁸⁵*Ibid*, p. 10.

⁸⁶*Memoir of Ruth Follows*, p. 15.

⁸⁷*Memoirs of Catharine Phillips*, p. 207.

⁸⁸[Thomas Shillitoe,] *Journal of the Life, Labours and Travels of Thomas Shillitoe, in the service of the gospel of Jesus Christ* (London, 1839), p. 9.

⁸⁹Benjamin Seebohm (ed.), *Memoirs of William Forster* (2 vols., London, 1862), i, p. 201.

each gave a justifiable explanation for the existence of such deep attachment between two people. Further, one partner was attracted not to the physical being of the other but to that divine principle within, the Inner Light. Love of one's marriage partner was thus a living expression of one's love of God. This direct relationship between marital love and the love of God was encapsulated in Susanna Boone's description of an evening spent at home with her husband, during which it had pleased God, 'to unite us very near to each other, I hope in himself, who is a God of love.'⁹⁰ Hannah Backhouse likewise linked the two elements of sexual and divine attachment when she wrote to her husband, James, in 1821, 'I truly believe that the more faithful we are to our Lord and Master, the more we shall love and be united to each other.'⁹¹ As a couple found in marriage a new arena for the expression of their love of God they would work together, 'hand in hand,' as Sarah Lynes Grubb termed it,⁹² combining their efforts to do God's will. Through the shared pursuit of this goal husband and wife could find unparalleled happiness. Joseph Gurney Bevan described the marriage in which husband and wife who were united in the service of God, as 'the greatest of temporal felicities.'⁹³ Attending closely to divine guidance in marital matters was the only means of ensuring an enduring bond of love. Joseph John Gurney, writing in 1814 to a friend who was soon to be married, advised that conjugal happiness, 'will depend much less upon external circumstances, than upon your uniting "in the fear of the Lord and walking in his ways".'⁹⁴ Gurney's sister, Priscilla, wrote that for couples to rely on natural affections alone would result in only a fragile and transitory connection whilst coming together in the love and fear of God would sanctify their union and ensure a strong and eternal bond.⁹⁵ Marriage so undertaken became a symbol of love and obedience to God and redeemed human relationships from the impure sphere of natural passion.

As the discussion above on the Quaker ministry suggested, it was customary for Friends to look for denominationally recognised signs to reassure both themselves and others

⁹⁰'Diaries of Susanna Boone,' vol. 1, 31/1/1778.

⁹¹[Hannah Chapman Backhouse,] *Extracts from the Journal and Letters of Hannah Chapman Backhouse*, unpublished (printed, London, 1858), p. 44.

⁹²*Letters of Sarah Grubb*, p. 10.

⁹³[Joseph Gurney Bevan,] *Extracts from the Letters and Other Writings of the Late Joseph Gurney Bevan, Preceded by a Short Memoir of His Life* (London, 1821), p. 85.

⁹⁴Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney, with Selections from his Journal and Correspondence*, fourth ed. (2 vols. bound in 1, Philadelphia, 1857); ii, p. 106.

⁹⁵Susanna Corder (ed.) *Memoir of Priscilla Gurney* (London, 1856) p. 158.

that they were acting in accordance with the will of God rather than simply following their own inclinations. This was also the case with regard to marriage, where it was necessary to demonstrate that the relationship was founded on the enduring basis of divine direction and not on fleeting sexual attraction. Women contemplating marriage used their own emotional and physical well-being to gauge the presence or absence of divine approval. During their engagement Sarah Lynes told John Grubb that amidst all the cogitations that filled her mind she was abundantly persuaded that their union had God's blessing.⁹⁶ In 1823, Mary Capper wrote to her niece Katherine who had just become engaged to John Backhouse: 'It was a relief to my mind that thy important decision feels satisfactory, and that calmness seems given as an evidence of right movement. In all our steppings, this token of higher approbation than our best friends can give is truly desirable.'⁹⁷ In a similar vein, after Susanna Boone had a very successful day on which she was moved to speak in Meeting for worship and both the women's and men's Meetings for discipline, she recorded in her diary that it was, 'doubly comforting to my poor mind to have such a precious confirmation of divine favour at the very time I had given consent to proceed in marriage.'⁹⁸ Such emotional responses and strengthened spiritual abilities served as confirmation that the match was sanctioned by God.

The ideal marriage between two regenerate individuals could admit of no sexual hierarchy. Both were equally the obedient instruments of God so that the conventional, worldly claims that one had the natural right to exercise authority over the other were transcended and became meaningless. Nevertheless, Friends generally conformed to the belief that the roles and responsibilities of women and men in everyday life had different emphases, with women being primarily responsible for household management whilst men provided financially for their families. However, their appreciation that the ultimate duty of every person, female or male, lay in their relationship with God and submission to the divine will undercut this gendered division of labour. Either partner may be individually and irresistibly moved by God to perform religious duties which unequivocally took precedence over any earthly concerns. At the same time, the demands of daily life were a key theme in the construction of narratives of obedience to God.

Women Friends, and especially those who were called to travel in the ministry, overwhelmingly described the fulfilment of their religious duties in relation to their domestic

⁹⁶*Letters of Sarah Grubb*, p. 112.

⁹⁷*Memoir of Mary Capper*, p. 271.

⁹⁸'Diaries of Susanna Boone,' vol. 2, 7/4/1783.

and familial attachments. Whilst family ties were a blessing from God, to be cherished and enjoyed, they could also be employed by God as a means of testing the willingness of a minister to submit to the divine will. The sacredness and blessedness of family relationships could only be preserved if they held a subordinate place to the love and devotion which the individual showed towards God, and the on-going struggle to maintain the correct order of things is a recurrent theme in women Friends' writings. Committed Quaker women often represented the ties and duties of domestic life, which engaged their time and affections, as the most dangerous potential barrier to their realisation of total obedience to God. Elizabeth Fry, for example, confided to one of her sisters the fear that she was becoming so absorbed in the cares of household management that she was neglecting her spiritual duties.⁹⁹ Mary Dudley, meanwhile, feared that maternal love might impede her readiness to engage in the duties of ministry, writing:

Having a disposition naturally prone to affectionate attachment, I now began, in the addition of children, to feel my heart in danger of so centring in these gifts, as to fall short of occupying in the manner designed, with the gift received.¹⁰⁰

After Sarah Lynes Grubb had given birth in 1807, Joseph Gurney Bevan wrote to offer her a gentle word of caution. He wished her neither to check unduly nor to indulge 'the tender emotions of a young mother,' remarking that so long as she continued to prefer God to her child, 'I consider thy maternal feelings in a manner sanctified.'¹⁰¹

It was, indeed, the very closeness of domestic bonds which made them a suitable area for a trial of faith, and women who submitted to divine direction recorded the rewards of inner peace which they received for their obedience. Sarah Tuke Grubb, for example, was accompanied by her husband as far as Thirsk when travelling on a religious visit from York to Scotland. After they had parted, Sarah told a friend, 'I could thankfully say with the disciple formerly, "I have left all to follow thee."¹⁰² Sarah Lynes Grubb recalled that even after the birth of her children she was seldom at home, and left her first-born at eight months old to travel throughout Britain. She explained how she had reconciled herself to such trials: 'This and many such sacrifices have cost my nature much suffering, but I have apprehended them

⁹⁹*Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, i, p. 200.

¹⁰⁰*Life of Mary Dudley*, p. 31.

¹⁰¹*Letters and Writings of Joseph Gurney Bevan*, p. 103; *Letters of Sarah Grubb*, p. 118.

¹⁰²*Life of Sarah Grubb*, p. 45.

called for, as the first-fruits of all bestowed on us by our bountiful Creator.'¹⁰³ In a particularly poignant account of the temporary breaking of domestic ties Mary Dudley told her husband why she had not returned home at night during a visit to the various families in their Monthly Meeting of Cork:

I *determined* to proceed for meeting thee under our own roof this night, and even set out for that purpose. On entering the carriage, I instantly felt darkness cover my mind, still I went on, but I never remember being quite so much distressed - rebellion - rebellion sounded through my heart, and I grew so ill that I dared not proceed, so turned about, and had a comparatively lightsome journey hither, my mind and body feeling gradually relieved.¹⁰⁴

On another occasion Dudley travelled to France and Germany leaving behind her husband and seven children, the youngest of whom was ten weeks old. She wrote, 'many and sore were my provings, and of a closely trying nature my conflicts,' but she was sustained throughout by divine help and expressed relief that she had undertaken the journey, for the sufferings had 'tended to the further reduction of the creaturely will and choosing,' enabling her to submit more readily to God's commands.¹⁰⁵

The language employed by itinerant women ministers to describe their absences from home is redolent of that which was used during their experiences in the ministry. It was the language of suffering and sacrifice. As we have seen, Friends viewed the marriage bond as potentially the greatest source of happiness on earth, and children were a further blessing, so the ability to sever these ties even for a short time when divinely ordered to do so was understood to demand an unparalleled degree of submission to the will of God. By describing the emotional, even physical, trials which they underwent in the effort to overcome the ties of domestic love and attachment which they cultivated in everyday life in order to perform the service demanded of them by God, women Friends affirmed in a specifically female way their overriding devotion to God and submission to the divine will.

This gendered reconciliation of duties was fully integrated into the Society's ideal of femininity. When Quaker writers wished to delineate the characters of exemplary women Friends, they often did so by comparing evidence of their strong domestic attachments with proof of their willingness to leave home comforts and natural ties when called to do so by God.

¹⁰³ *Letters of Sarah Grubb*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ *Life of Mary Dudley*, pp. 83-4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

The two ideas could be suggested by juxtaposition, as in the following account of Deborah Backhouse which was included in the memoir of her husband, James:

About a year after her marriage, with the concurrence of her Monthly Meeting, and in company with her friend Ann Alexander, she visited in gospel love the families belonging to York Meeting. She was a very affectionate wife and mother, exemplary in her religious care over her children and servants.¹⁰⁶

A more explicit pattern was often used by the editors of the *Piety Promoted* series. These volumes were published every few decades, and provide a valuable source of information about the Society's construction of 'ideal' Friends, being collections of pen portraits of recently deceased Quaker ministers designed for the encouragement and edification to the living. Of Elizabeth Evans, for example, it was written:

Notwithstanding she had the care of a large family of children, and much affliction fell to her lot by the decease of several of them ... she continued freely given up to travel in the exercise of the gift which she had received, as the pointings of duty were manifested to her.¹⁰⁷

Tabitha Marriott, meanwhile, was described as a 'deeply baptized and powerful gospel minister,' and although, 'the confinement incident to an increasing family sometimes kept her at home; yet she still continued to travel in the service of Truth.'¹⁰⁸ Hannah Hall too had a large family which she raised in an exemplary manner, yet

in 1783 she visited meetings in Lancashire and Cheshire ... and about ten years afterwards, in company with her mother, paid a religious visit to the Isle of Man ... In 1801 she visited Scotland, and afterwards families in the greatest part of her own monthly meeting.¹⁰⁹

A model Quaker woman was one who at once forged strong familial ties and was devoted to her domestic tasks and was also able to demonstrate her overarching reverence for God by leaving such human restraints to fulfil her divinely-ordained duty.

Friends' acceptance that women could combine the exercise of domestic and religious

¹⁰⁶*Memoir of James Backhouse*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷Joseph Gurney Bevan (ed.), *Piety Promoted, in Brief Memorials and Dying Expressions of Some of the Society of Friends: Part 10* (London, 1811), pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 258.

responsibilities was symbolically encapsulated in the denominational use of the gendered Biblical appellation 'Mother in Israel' to distinguish women who displayed a particular gift for kindling and fostering the spiritual welfare of others from their sisters in the Society. Women so described were acknowledged as possessing religious maturity and spiritual wisdom. On the two occasions on which the title Mother in Israel is used to describe women in the Bible, their 'motherhood' is interpreted in a societal sense and this was also Friends' understanding of the term.¹¹⁰ 'Mother,' of course, signalled the possession of maternal authority in 'Israel,' the church of God. In 1672 George Fox had enshrined this office within Quakerism when he wrote:

And the elder women in the Truth were not only called elders, but mothers. Now a mother in the church of Christ, and a mother in Israel, is one that nourishes, and feeds, and washes, and rules, and is a teacher in the Church, and in the Israel of God, and an admonisher, an instructor, an exhorter. So the elder women and mothers are to be the teachers of good things.¹¹¹

There is evidence to suggest that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a conscious effort was made in the women's Meetings for discipline to stir up those of proven religious experience and wisdom to take on their sanctioned leadership role of guiding and nurturing the spiritual development of young, particularly women, Friends. For example, in 1791 the epistle from the Yearly Meeting of women Friends observed that many younger members were beginning to experience the work of God within their souls, and expressed the hope that within the local women's Meetings, 'such as may for many years have filled the office of Clerks will, as Mothers in Israel or elder sisters in the Church, kindly assist such prepared minds.'¹¹²

¹¹⁰Judges, 5: 6-7 and II Samuel, 20:1. See Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 35-37. Valenze examines the use of the title Mother in Israel as it was applied within sectarian Methodism in the early nineteenth century. Its meaning appears to have been very similar to that used within Quakerism, and it is possible that sectarian Methodist women drew on the Quaker example in adopting the term to signify older, spiritually wise women. Friends represented the most obvious precedent available to them of a sustained female ministry; indeed Hugh Bourne, the founder of Primitive Methodism, was attracted to the idea of using women itinerant preacher after reading the writings of early Friends, and through his association with the Quaker Methodists of Warrington. Sectarian Methodists also looked to Society usage for examples of pious practice in other areas. For instance, the plainness of Quaker dress and speech was held up as a model by Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists. See, Wesley F. Swift, 'The women itinerant preachers of early Methodism,' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 28 (1982), pp. 89-94; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume II: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 206-7.

¹¹¹Tuke, *Epistles of Fox*, p. 142.

¹¹²Copies of epistles from the Women's Yearly Meetings. '

Mothers in Israel were not necessarily literally mothers, but the point is that the functions culturally associated by Friends with women's actual biological mothering - caring, nurturing, teaching - were extended onto a spiritual level and embraced the church as a whole. The potency of this image within Quakerism is highlighted if we invert the comparison, for just as the language of biological motherhood was applied to justify a corporate maternal role, so the duties of biological mothering were themselves understood as having important implications for the Society as a whole. Raising children who would remain faithful to Friends beliefs and practices was a serious concern for the survival of the Society. Mothers, identified as those chiefly responsible for the early education of the next generation of Friends, were urged 'to exercise greater care and watchful diligence' over their children in order to prepare them mentally for attending to the guidance of the Inner Light, thereby contributing to the overall spiritual strengthening of the Society.¹¹³ This duty extended beyond simply those women who had a special divine gift. Catherine Phillips made explicit the link between motherhood and corporate discipline when she asserted: 'As mothers of children and mistresses of families [women] have an extensive service to attend to, and ought to be concerned so to discipline their families as to be able to answer the several queries relating to their situation.'¹¹⁴ The spiritual nurturing of their own children by women Friends who were mothers in the biological sense was practically the same in both form and intent as the guidance which experienced women Friends dispensed throughout the Society as a whole. In both cases, women's nurturing function meant personally bringing forth the spiritual fruits in the souls of individual young or faltering Friends as part of the wider quest to increase and uphold attention to the Truth throughout the Society as a whole.

Fusing the concepts of biological and societal motherhood rendered women's assumption of religious authority perfectly natural. There was no male equivalent of the semi-official title of Mother in Israel, but occasionally another biblical representation, that of the 'nursing father,'¹¹⁵ was used to describe tender, loving and religiously experienced men

¹¹³Copies of epistles from the Women's Yearly Meetings. ' 1786. See also, for example, 1819.

¹¹⁴*Life of Catherine Phillips*, p. 289; *Memorials of Rebecca Jones*, p. 65. When in 1678 Mary Pennington addressed an epistle to women Friends urging them to maintain their own Meetings, she described their function in language which invoked women's supposedly natural nurturing and housekeeping roles, transferred onto a societal scale: 'Our place in the creation is to bring forth & raise up, ... to w^{ch} o[u]r employm^t in the Church of God appears to bring forth & nurture, to cleanse out w^t is unsavoury & unclean, to cast out evill [*sic*] doers out of the house of God to preserve keep wholesome and orderly things in this house. The men need not grudg [*sic*] up this place in the body, wherein we are meet helps, and usurp not authority over th[e]m.' Quoted in H. Larry Ingle, 'A Quaker woman on women's roles: Mary Pennington to Friends, 1678,' *Signs: a Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 16 (1991), p. 595. See also Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 212-35.

¹¹⁵Isaiah 49 v 23

Friends. George Fox had been so called by Margaret Fell and, for example, in 1802 Mary Capper recorded in her journal the death of Timothy Bevington, 'our valued friend and nursing father in the Church.'¹¹⁶ The use of this title is revealing: it indicates a positive appreciation among Friends of attributes conventionally classified as 'feminine' in their denominational exemplars of both sexes. The 'nursing father' combined paternal authority with the 'feminine' tendencies towards nurturing and caring. Indeed, looking at Friends' conception of masculinity alongside that of femininity makes it clear not only that the character and conduct demanded from both sexes in daily life were remarkably similar, but also that exhibiting distinctly 'feminine' qualities was a key dimension of the Quaker ideal. For example, in 1808 Henry Tuke of York published a compendium of *The Duties of Religion and Morality* inculcated in the Scriptures in which he observed:

Meekness is a virtue which is particularly recommended to the female sex, by the Apostle Peter: but when we consider the great importance which he attaches to it, we must allow that it would be greatly in the interests of both sexes to obtain possession of it.¹¹⁷

Similarly, the duty to cultivate and treasure the family as a site for the promotion and preservation the Truth was incumbent upon men as well as women. This domestic orientation complemented the testimonies which Friends bore against the activities and diversions of 'the world', and Thomas Clarkson identified it as the root of Quakers' distinctive marital relationships:

In consequence of denying themselves the pleasures of the world, [Friends] have been obliged to cherish those which are found in domestic life. In the fashionable world men and their wives seldom follow their pleasures together. ... But this is not the case with the quakers. The husband and wife are not so easily separable. The husband is never seen at a play, nor a tavern, nor a dance. Neither the naval nor the military profession summons him abroad. ... Hence he must of necessity be much at home.¹¹⁸

The attachment of eminent men Friends to their families and home life was often highlighted as an exemplary trait in their characters. Of Samuel Dwyer, for example, it was written, 'In

¹¹⁶*Memoir of Mary Capper*, p. 125.

¹¹⁷Henry Tuke, *The Duties of Religion and Morality as Indicated in Holy Scriptures, with Preliminary and Occasional Observations* (York, 1808), p. 142.

¹¹⁸Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism*, iii, p. 302.

domestic life he was an affectionate husband and tender father,¹¹⁹ and a pen portrait of William Tuke recorded his model conduct, 'in the endearing relations of husband and parent.'¹²⁰

However, domestic ties were rarely invoked in men Friends' narratives of religious duty and devotion to God. Instead, in male accounts it was conduct in business and trade which was used as a gauge of faithfulness. Evidence that men had resisted the lure of worldly wealth and status in favour of service to God was a central theme in representations of ideal Quaker masculinity. Jeremiah Waring, for example, assisted his parents in their trade, 'but having a competence for his own limited desires, he never embarked in trade on his own account,' instead devoting his time and talents to the service of others and the Society.¹²¹ Thomas Cash, an active minister, found that his business ties so threatened his spiritual welfare by introducing him into 'the converse and hurry of the world' that he made it 'his frequent practice to break off and retire, to seek for a renewal of strength from Him,'¹²² and William Wright, though an industrious tradesman, 'appeared to live loose from the world.'¹²³ Men had to work out a path which both enabled them to fulfil their responsibility to live industriously and provide so far as was within their power for their families needs, yet did not lead into habits of avarice or material extravagance.¹²⁴ The dilemma was experienced by William Forster, who ultimately resolved it by leaving the family business to concentrate on his ministerial duties. He wrote to his friend, Robert Jowitt, that he seemed to be caught between paying either too little or too much attention to business. Indifference fostered habits of idleness whilst pursuing it too avidly 'leads to many evils. It seems to fetter the mind to the earth.'¹²⁵ Frugal living within honestly-gained means was the ideal standard, exemplified by plainness of speech, behaviour, dress and domestic accoutrements.

Yet implicit within these formulations of exemplary Quaker masculinity lurked the

¹¹⁹*Piety Promoted: 10*, p. 297.

¹²⁰*Piety Promoted: 11*, p. 294.

¹²¹*Piety Promoted: 10*, p. 59.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹²⁴Whilst Friends displayed an uncommon degree of concern to care for their poorer members, they also exercised a somewhat harsh discipline over those who descended into poverty through business failure. Bankruptcy was regarded as the result of moral degeneracy. It was the just end for those whose worldliness had led to greed and the over-stretching of their resources, and the penalty could be disownment.

¹²⁵*Memoir of William Forster*, p. 42.

assumption that men were naturally disposed to crave worldly wealth and consequence. It was, moreover, an assumption which appeared to have disturbing resonance for the Society during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when a growing number of male Friends distinguished themselves as substantial achievers in the business, commercial and trading communities. Not only did this success gain Quaker men an unfavourable reputation outside the Society for their 'money-getting spirit,'¹²⁶ but it is also evident from pronouncements made within the Society that it caused considerable unease among Friends themselves.¹²⁷ In their advice to others, ministers repeatedly noted the particular susceptibility of men rather than women to the attractions of 'the world'.¹²⁸ The Friends quoted in the previous section of this chapter who charged men with want of humility in the face of their hostility towards a women's Yearly Meeting with equal status to their own drew on this unfavourable strand in the denominational discourse about masculinity.

Comparing how Friends conceptualized the struggles of each sex to reconcile the demands of their spiritual lives with their different domestic and familial responsibilities highlights the way in which gendered ideas about the natures of women and men fused with the tenets of Quaker spirituality to hint at the superior capacity of women to live submissive to the divine will on two key levels. First, the qualities of character and conduct promoted among Friends esteemed conventionally 'feminine' attributes as those most befitting the true believer of either sex. Secondly, women's accounts of their suffering and sacrifice as they struggled to overcome the personal ties of home and family in order to perform the duties demanded of them by God provided them with another opportunity to demonstrate their deep devotion and faithfulness. The accounts given by and about men who were able to limit their business activities lacked the deeply emotional cutting edge found in women's autobiographical and biographical representations. For women, undertaking special religious duties meant overcoming natural female feelings, but they were feelings which were nevertheless rooted in the sanctified bonds of family life. Devotedness of a woman to her familial and domestic responsibilities, provided it did not impede her performance of other religious tasks, was not in itself a cause for censure. By contrast, the daily responsibilities against which men's religious duties were juxtaposed reflected their supposedly natural

¹²⁶Clarkson refuted the charge that Friends were motivated by avarice, but acknowledged: 'This character is considered as belonging so generally to the individuals of this Society, that it is held by the world to be almost inseparable from Quakerism.' *Portraiture of Quakerism*, iii, pp. 253-271.

¹²⁷See for example, *Yearly Meeting Epistles* ii, pp. 93 and. 138.

¹²⁸See for example, *Life of Sarah Grubb*, p. 268-9; *Life of Mary Capper*, p. 145; Susanna Corder (ed.), *Memoir of Priscilla Gurney* (London, 1856), p. 20.

tendency towards involvement with affairs of 'the world.' Women's disposition was inherently more spiritually focussed than men's.

The impact of evangelicalism

The positive connection which Friends made between femininity and spiritual capacity was forged during the eighteenth-century heyday of Quietist mysticism and was supported by this theological current. From the beginning of the nineteenth century however, and especially after the mid-1820s, a different doctrinal tendency also began to affect the Society. A conscious effort was made by an increasingly high-profile, influential and overwhelmingly male elite to shift the basis of belief away from Quietism towards evangelicalism and to integrate the Society into the wider Christian community. One result of this shift was a questioning of the grounds on which Quaker women had come to occupy their pre-eminent position as the denomination's spiritual leaders.

At the heart of the theological contrast between Quietist and evangelical Quakerism lay different beliefs about the ultimate seat of religious authority. Quietists, as we have seen, held that the source of divine knowledge and only true guide to action in faith and life lay in the revelations which the Spirit of God imparted directly to the individual. The Bible was esteemed as a work of great value which could act as an aid to piety and Quietists often wrote of retiring to read the Scriptures under the guidance of Spirit; it was not, however, the chief arbiter of faith. Robert Barclay had asserted that, although the Scriptures were divinely inspired:

nevertheless, because they are only a declaration of the *fountain*, and not the *fountain* itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principle ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the *adequate primary rule of all faith and manners*. ... they are and may be esteemed a *secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit*.¹²⁹

That same Spirit which had inspired the biblical authors could make its will known at any time to anyone who was prepared to heed it. Evangelicals on the other hand regarded Scripture itself, rather than the Inner Light or Spirit, as the primary source by which religious knowledge and truth were revealed to humankind.

The prime mover in steering the Society towards a more evangelical, Bible-centred

¹²⁹Barclay, *Apology*, p. 5.

approach to religion and morality during the 1820s and 1830s was the Norwich minister, theologian and banker, Joseph John Gurney.¹³⁰ However, as Sheila Wright's recent work on York Monthly Meeting has shown, there was an evangelical current present in the Society from the early years of the nineteenth century¹³¹ when Henry Tuke and Lindley Murray of York Meeting laid the foundations of evangelical Quakerism.¹³² In three influential works - *The Faith of the People Called Quakers* (1801), *The Principles of Religion* (1805) and *The Duties of Religion and Morality* (1808) - Tuke developed his argument that Friends had always believed in the central doctrines of orthodox Christianity: the divinity of Christ and the atoning sacrifice of his death.¹³³ Tuke balanced the Bible in importance with the guidance of the Spirit as a source of reference in matters of faith,¹³⁴ and argued that on questions of religious and moral duties in daily life the Scriptures held the key to defining acceptable behaviour.¹³⁵ This perspective shifted the ethical arbiter of behaviour from the individual conscience to Scriptural directions.

Henry Tuke died in 1815, but the ball which he had started rolling gained additional impetus through the work of Joseph John Gurney in the 1820s. In 1824 Gurney published a volume of observations on the beliefs and peculiarities of Friends. He acknowledged that, as the book was of a purely religious nature:

it has of course been necessary for me largely to refer to that sacred book, to the test of which all religious opinions are rightly brought, since it was given by inspiration of God, and contains a divinely authorised record of the doctrines which we ought to believe, and of the duties which we are required to practise.¹³⁶

Like Tuke he mixed in elements of more conventional Quakerism with innovation, acknowledging that the true way to salvation laid out in the Scriptures could only be divined

¹³⁰Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, pp. 3-4.

¹³¹Wright, *Friends in York*, ch. 2.

¹³²*Ibid.*, pp. 24-30.

¹³³Henry Tuke, *The Faith of the People Called Quakers, in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: as set forth in various extracts from their writings*, (London, 1801); *idem*, *The Principles of Religion as Professed by the Society of Christians Usually Called Quakers* (York, 1805); *idem*, *The Duties of Religion and Morality as Inculcated in the Holy Scriptures: with preliminary and occasional observations*, (York, 1808).

¹³⁴*Faith of the Quakers*, p. 29; *Principles of Religion*, pp. 29-30.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 6; *Duties of Religion and Morality*, pp. v-vi.

¹³⁶Joseph John Gurney, *Observations on the Religious Peculiarities of the Society of Friends* (London, 1824), p. ix.

if they were approached with the 'spiritual eye' open. In a manner unlike that of Friends before him, however, Gurney suggested that the true path could only be known by those who had access to the Scriptures. Quietist Quakers had contended that as the Light dwelt in every person, divine grace was accessible to all, irrespective of external circumstances. Yet Gurney argued that the bringing 'out of darkness into marvellous light' could be effected only by a combined process of reading the information contained in the Scriptures and understanding it through the spiritual illumination offered by the Inner Light.¹³⁷

It is impossible for us to know how widespread the acceptance of evangelical teaching was among Friends as a whole, but by the 1830s it dominated the outlook of those who directed proceedings in the upper echelons of the Society's executive.. The definite turning-point in the dominant theological direction of Quaker thought has been traced to the judgement of London Yearly Meeting in 1829 when Friends were encouraged, 'only to accept in simplicity the doctrinal truths of Holy Scripture, but earnestly strive that we may be coming up in the practice of every Christian virtue.' Furthermore, they were urged, the true Christian would 'often mediate upon the precepts and example of our blessed Lord and Saviour.' as these were revealed in the Bible.¹³⁸ By 1836, in what amounted to an almost direct reversal of Barclay's teaching, London Yearly Meeting judged that the Scriptures

are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus; being the appointed means of making known to us the blessed truths of Christianity ... that whatsoever any man says or does, which is contrary to the Scriptures, though under profession of the immediate guidance of the Spirit, must be reckoned and accounted a mere delusion.¹³⁹

Friends were being advised to direct their attention to the life and teachings of the man, Jesus of Nazareth as they were set out in the medium of the Bible, rather than to Christ the spiritual guide which manifested itself immediately within their own hearts.

The search by some influential Friends for stability in orthodoxy in the early nineteenth century was directly linked to episodes when the Society's moral and religious integrity was perceived to be under threat. For example, Henry Tuke's innovative doctrinal works must be understood against the background of two disruptive events which had recently taken place within the international Quaker community. First, there was a wave of Unitarianism in Irish

¹³⁷*Ibid*, pp. 23-4.

¹³⁸*Yearly Meeting Epistles*, ii, p. 232; Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, p. 6.

¹³⁹*Ibid*, p. 272.

Quakerism during the 1790s and early 1800s when, stimulated by an Enlightenment spirit of religious enquiry, a number of Irish Friends declared themselves unable to square the warrior passages of the Old Testament with their image of a loving and merciful God. The heterodoxy snowballed. Professing supreme reverence for the workings of the Inner Light the miscreants were, according to their opponents, 'in a disposition to lay waste in a great measure the Holy Scriptures [and] disputed the divinity of Christ.' Many resigned or were disowned.¹⁴⁰ The second incident occurred in 1798, when the visiting American minister, Hannah Barnard, was silenced by London Yearly Meeting for expressing Unitarian sentiments on the basis of Scriptural enquiry. She was subsequently disowned by her Meeting in New York.¹⁴¹ For a denomination as small as the Society of Friends these events seemed to portend impending crisis, against which Tuke's publications were a vigorous counterblast. In both *The Faith of the Quakers* and *The Principles of Religion* he argued for the historical orthodoxy of Quaker beliefs, warning of the need to confirm soundness of doctrine in 'this age of scepticism and infidelity.' He wrote extensively on the evidence for the inspired testimony of the Scriptures, asserting 'I have particularly endeavoured to obviate the principal objections made against them; since it is by attempting to invalidate their authenticity and divine authority, that the enemies of the Christian religion attack our faith.'¹⁴² Tuke undoubtedly believed that he was upholding the ancient beliefs of Quakerism, but in striving to counter a heterodox stream within the Society he relied on orthodox teaching to an unprecedented degree.

The ascendancy of the evangelical wing within the Society by the 1830s also took place against a background of fear about infidelity, this time based upon events taking place in the United States. In 1827-8 groups of Friends from numerous American Meetings followed the minister Elias Hicks to form a schismatic Quaker sect. Hicks was alarmed at what he perceived as the worldliness and empty professions of religion which characterised the urban Quaker elite in Philadelphia. He led older Friends and those from rural or marginal urban Meetings in the drive for a complete and continual reformation of the Society based upon 'the leading and inspiration of the Spirit of Truth.'¹⁴³ The central element of his message was that

¹⁴⁰Quoted in Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, p. 25.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁴²Tuke, *Faith of the Quakers*, p. iii; *idem.*, *Principles of Religion*, p. iv and pp. 6-31.

¹⁴³H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* (Knoxville, 1986). Ingle's analysis of the Hicksite separation highlights the extremely complex, often tangled nature of the theological shifts taking place within the Society during this period. The Hicksite reformation was itself in part a response to the evangelical theology which many of America's wealthy, urban Quaker elite had embraced. The incipient division within American Quakerism was stimulated during the 1820s by visits from English Friends such as William Forster,

the Inward Light revealed God's word, and so Friends need look to no other authority.¹⁴⁴ The separation shocked and distressed Quakers in the transatlantic community. There was alarm in London Yearly Meeting. In 1829 the Committee responsible for drafting the Yearly *Epistle* drew up a declamatory minute which recorded the sympathy of the Meeting with their Orthodox American brethren under 'the close trials to which they have been subjected by the diffusion of anti-christian doctrines among them,' and went on to disclaim 'any connexion as a religious society with any Meeting for the purpose of worship or discipline, which have been established or which are upheld by those who have embraced such anti-christian doctrines.' It affirmed Quakers' belief in the ultimate authority of the Scriptures, the fallen nature of humanity, Christ's divinity and his atoning death.¹⁴⁵ The English evangelical backlash against Hicksism rumbled on, and in 1835 a Kendal Friend, Isaac Crewdson, published *A Beacon to the Society of Friends* which culminated in the evangelical Beaconite schism of the following year. Crewdson's work was a direct response to 'that desolating heresy' of Hicksism, and blamed the schism upon the failure of Quakerism to instill sound Christian doctrine in its members.¹⁴⁶ It argued that mysticism could never be the religion of Christ, and that regarding the Inner Light as the primary rule of faith and practice had no basis in Scripture. Such beliefs, he believed, could only lead into error and 'an entire perversion of the Gospel of Christ.'¹⁴⁷

The fear of internal disintegration as the Society was fissured by heretical streams helps to explain the timing of the shift towards evangelical teaching. It does not, however, explain precisely why it was to orthodox theology in particular that some Friends turned in their quest to buttress the Society rather than stressing in the traditional Quaker manner the importance of personal attendance to the Inner Light. The answer to this question lies in changes taking place in the relationship between the Society of Friends and in the wider Christian community. For it was as an antidote to the imputation of heresy from without, as well as to the threat of it from within, that some Friends promoted orthodox teaching.

During the eighteenth century, as we have seen, Quakers were urged to avoid all unnecessary involvement in the concerns and controversies of 'the world' which would

George Withy and Elizabeth Robson who were sympathetic to the evangelical wing. In turn, as I suggest here, when the schism took place it encouraged English Quakerism in a more evangelical direction.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 80-92.

¹⁴⁵Minutes of London Yearly Meeting, 1829, pp. 346-353, mf44, FHL.

¹⁴⁶Isaac Crewdson, *A Beacon to the Society of Friends* (London, 1835), p. 6.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 153-4.

distract the mind from its true centre on the Inner Light. Towards the end of the century, though, the gulf between the Society and other denominations began slowly to be bridged through their cooperation in philanthropic and humanitarian concerns which began with the efforts to end the slave trade.¹⁴⁸ This cooperation was made possible in part because of the change which the Evangelical Revival had stimulated in the religious tone of other professing Christian churches. Anglican evangelicals such as William Wilberforce and Hannah More, wrote extensively and influentially of the need for social reformation on the basis of 'serious' Christianity. There was much in the ethical and social outlook of Anglican evangelicals in particular which harmonized with Friends' beliefs, and a new breed of Quakers emerged who displayed a readiness to work with those of other denominations on a scale which would have been unthinkable to earlier Quietist generations. They shared a sense of horror and despair at what they perceived as the pervasive irreligion of their age, whereas *Quietist Friends had been* concerned only with the behaviour of those who belonged to the Society. When Gurney bewailed 'the miserably low moral standard prevailing in the world'¹⁴⁹ in 1819 he echoed the sentiments expressed over twenty years earlier by William Wilberforce who had lamented the abundance of wealthy and influential individuals who were merely nominal Christians with 'scarcely any distinct knowledge of the nature and principles of the Religion which they profess.'¹⁵⁰

The rigorous evangelicalism with its attendant codes of moral and social behaviour exemplified by Anglican evangelicals acquired growing purchase during the early decades of the nineteenth century as the standard of religiosity against which those in the middle classes with pretensions to respectability were measured. It was in this context that Friends sought in evangelical theology a means of removing the taint of heresy. Both Tuke and Gurney devoted chapters in their major expositions of Friends' beliefs and practices to illustrating the central tenets of Christianity on which all denominations, Quakers included, agreed.¹⁵¹ By doing so they aimed both to reduce Friends' sense of 'otherness' which might lead other denominations to regard them with suspicion and to see Quakerism integrated into respectable, middle-class Christian society.

This trend towards integration helped to reduce the Society's position as a group of

¹⁴⁸LPQ; Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*; James Walvin, *The Quakers: money and morals* (London, 1997), ch. 8.

¹⁴⁹Braithwaite, *Memoirs of Gurney*, p. 189.

¹⁵⁰Wilberforce, *Practical View*, p. iii.

¹⁵¹Tuke, *Principles of Religion*, pp. 1-69; Gurney, *Observations on Quakers*, ch. 1.

'peculiar people' living in partial isolation from 'the world,'¹⁵² but there was a gendered dimension to this reorientation of Quakerism within the wider Christian community. During the Quietist decades women's ministry appeared as just another of the many 'peculiarities' of Friends.¹⁵³ Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the images of Quaker women which were delineated by those outside the Society were overwhelmingly positive. In periodical literature, fiction and drama women Friends were depicted as models of dignity, equanimity and presence of mind.¹⁵⁴ The most extensive rendering of the character of Quaker women came from Thomas Clarkson, and he was florid in his praise. Women Friends shared the independence of mind, benevolence and other positive moral traits of their brethren, but none of their reputed imperfections such as want of knowledge. Their pursuits were 'rational, useful and dignified.' Moreover, Clarkson explicitly linked these positive attributes to the ministerial and administrative roles of Quaker women of which, as I observed at the start of this chapter, he so approved:

The execution of these and other public offices, by which the Quaker-women have an important station allotted them in society, cannot but have an important influence on their minds. It gives them, in fact, a new cast of character. ... It produces in them thought, and foresight, and judgement. It creates in them a care and concern for the distressed. It elevates their ideas. It raises in them a sense of their own dignity and importance as human beings, which sets them above everything that is little and trifling, and above all idle parade and show.¹⁵⁵

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, though, at least among those with evangelical tendencies, there is evidence of unease at the prominent and authoritative place which women Friends occupied within the Society. In his *Observations on Friends* Gurney

¹⁵²Elizabeth Isichei illustrates how the evangelical group within Quakerism which gained the upper hand during the 1830s was able to campaign successfully for the abolition of many of the barriers which marked Quakers off from 'the world,' *Victorian Quakers*, p. 10 and ch. 5. See also Wright, *Friends in York*, p. 29.

¹⁵³There seems to have been some variation in opinion among Quaker women about the extent to which the 'novelty value' of their ministry to the outside world should be harnessed and exploited in Friends' public preaching. For example, Mary Alexander paid a religious visit to the Isle of Man in 1804, and a large public meeting was held in Douglas. Neither her brother nor another male companion made any impression on the audience but when Mary was moved to rise up and speak, as she reflected, 'Probably the novelty of a female's appearance in such a manner, might have place with some of them, so that in a short time they became much quieter, and more attentive.' However, Mary Dudley 'greatly objected to the word *female* being inserted' in a notice designed to attract people to a public meeting in 1817. See *Life of Mary Alexander*, pp. 142-5; Tylor, *Memoirs of Elizabeth Dudley*, p. 50.

¹⁵⁴Patricia Howell Michaelson, 'Religious bases of eighteenth-century feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Quakers,' *Women's Studies: an Interdisciplinary Journal*, 22 (1993), pp. 284-286.

¹⁵⁵Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism*, iii, pp. 284-290.

devoted an entire chapter to explaining why they accepted the ministry of women. His arguments were by and large the tried and tested ones of his religious forbears, stressing the instrumental nature of true gospel ministry, citing biblical precedents for women's exercise of divinely-given authority and refuting the objections which might be drawn from Paul's Epistles to Timothy and the Corinthians. However, in the final paragraph of the chapter he made an unprecedented departure to set out his misgivings about the spiritual and numerical eminence of women ministers within the contemporary Quaker ministry. His comments which he then offered are revealing and important:

Justified, as Friends appear to be, by the doctrine of Scripture, and by the powerful operations of the Spirit of truth, in equally admitting the ministry of both sexes; it is far indeed from being an indication of life and soundness in the body at large, when the stronger sex withdraws from the battles of the Lord, and leaves them to be fought by those whose physical weakness and delicacy have an obvious *tendency* to render them less fit for the combat.¹⁵⁶

In this passage, Gurney struck at the very foundations on which Quietist Quaker women had built a strong female ministry. He not only directly subverted the traditional assumption that in the act of true ministry all aspects of the human and physical identity of the individual minister were suspended including that of gender; but also challenged the established thinking among Friends about femininity in which images of female physical weakness were interpreted to suggest that women could be especially effective channels for the word of God. The schismatic Evangelical Friends of Manchester who broke away from the parent church in 1836 in the wake of the *Beacon* controversy took the assault on women's right to minister much further. When they met to establish their own form of church organisation in 1837, they rejected women's ministry outright as unscriptural.¹⁵⁷

Within the main body of the Society the ministry of women was retained, but as Gurney's comments above indicate, concerns were being expressed about women's religious leadership by some evangelical Friends. This uneasiness reflects the way in which the gradual emergence of Friends from a state of partial withdrawal into the wider middle-class community of 'serious' Christians did not mean the same thing for women and men. Cross-denominational closeness was facilitated because, in terms of culture, the gap between

¹⁵⁶Gurney, *Observations on the Peculiarities of Friends*, ch. 8, especially pp. 224-5. Thirty-five years later Joseph Stephenson Rowntree included Gurney's statement on the negative implications of a strong female ministry when setting out what he believed to be the reasons for the Society's decline. Rowntree observed that, 'there will hardly be a dissent' from such an opinion. Rowntree, *Quakerism Past and Present*, pp. 106-7.

¹⁵⁷Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, p. 48.

committed men in the Society and those in other denominations, Anglicanism in particular, had substantially reduced since the eighteenth century. Many Quaker men had become weighty members of the inter-denominational business community. At the same time, under the influence of the Evangelical Revival and the concomitant drive for moral reformation on the foundation of 'real' Christianity, those from other denominations had embraced many of the Friends' ideas about appropriate male characteristics. Moral rectitude, sensitivity to the weak, and the shunning of bawdy, boozy or bloody leisure pursuits in favour of domestic recreations ceased to be the preserve of a peculiar few, and became the common code of respectable, middle-class manliness.¹⁵⁸ As Quaker men sought acceptance in this wider Christian brotherhood the authoritative religious status which Quaker women held within their denomination must have seemed increasingly anomalous, perhaps even embarrassing. With notions of desirable behaviour among the urban middle class increasingly articulated in terms of appropriate, well-defined and distinctive roles for men and women, a key feature which set Quaker men apart from others within this community was the behaviour of their womenfolk.

¹⁵⁸John Tosh, *A Man's Place: masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England* (London, 1999); Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 108-113.

Chapter Two

‘Degrade the sex, and thou degrad'st the kind!’: Unitarian gender ideology and the quest for mental and moral progress.

Introduction

This chapter explores the ideas which Unitarians articulated in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates about the nature of women, their roles in society, and the ideal model of relations which should subsist between the sexes. Although themes within their gender ideology reflected those common to other middle-class, Christian discourses of the period, stressing domesticity and the domestic affections as primary sites for the individual pursuit of virtue, it is also possible to identify a distinctively Unitarian viewpoint on questions of femininity, of masculinity and of gender relations. An appreciation of the implications of sexual difference was undercut by emphasis on the human potential for rational and moral improvement. This perspective originated in the unorthodox and optimistic theological system mapped out by the denomination's leaders who were firmly wedded to the progressive, rationalist tenets of the Enlightenment. Within the general current of Unitarian thinking on women and gender, though, a very subtle shift can be discerned taking place during the 1810s and 1820s. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century the identical mental and moral capacities of women and men were highlighted, along with an egalitarian ideal of gender relations - especially in marriage - which was seen as the key to further progress in the knowledge and virtue of each sex. This vision was used to underwrite arguments in favour of the rational reformation of women's education. In the decades after about 1810 Unitarians continued to stress the mental capabilities of women and to argue the need for rational female education. However, they also began on the one hand to place less emphasis on the creation of an egalitarian and progressive union of the sexes, and on the other hand to employ arguments which stressed sexual difference and the special role of women as guardians of morality, and which in doing so were redolent of contemporary Anglican evangelical gender ideology..

Reason, Revelation and Progress

The Enlightenment provided the cultural environment within which the Unitarian denomination evolved from the 1770s onwards, and its legacy was the primary influence on the theological and intellectual direction of Unitarian beliefs for at least the following half-century. Of course the ideas at the heart of Enlightenment thought - optimistic belief in the capacity of individual human reason, and the conviction that humankind could uncover the secrets of the natural world - dominated the intellectual scene in Europe from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century.¹ What distinguished Unitarians within this context was the way that, as a group, they followed a determined and radical programme of reconciling Biblical revelation with reason and science. Inspired by advances in the various fields of scientific knowledge, Unitarians argued that applying rational criteria to the study of the Scriptures was the only way for humanity to uncover the truth of the Christian revelation: 'just as the book of nature had yielded her secrets to mathematics, Scripture, the book of revelation, would yield hers to reason.'² The uncompromising assertion of Unitarians that reason should be the primary arbiter of Scripture developed out of a rationalist current within English Protestantism which has been traced back at least as far as the early seventeenth century,³ although its more immediate heritage was in Rational Dissent and Anglican Latitudinarianism of the eighteenth century.⁴ Belief in the potential for simultaneous advancement across all areas of human understanding and culture, both secular and religious, gave Unitarians a foremost place as advocates of the message of past and future progress which was a central and distinguishing tenet of English Enlightenment thought from the mid-eighteenth century

¹Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981).

²John Fitzpatrick, 'Toleration and truth,' *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 1 (1982) p. 10. See also John Seed, 'The role of Unitarianism in the formation of liberal culture, 1775-1851: a social history,' University of Hull Phd (1981), pp. 3-31.

³R. K. Webb, 'The Unitarian background,' in Barbara Smith (ed.), *Truth, Liberty, Religion: essays celebrating two hundred years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986) pp. 1-30. The evolution of Rational Dissent and background to the emergence of Unitarianism is traced through the following articles: Roger Thomas, 'Partners in Nonconformity,' pp. 93-112; *idem*, 'Presbyterians in transition,' pp. 113-174 and Jeremy Goring, 'The break-up of the old Dissent,' pp. 175-218, all in C. G. Bolam *et al*, *The English Presbyterians: from Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London, 1968). See also H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-century England* (Oxford, 1951).

⁴For the dissenting tradition see Webb, 'The Unitarian background,' pp. 1-30; H. L. Short, 'From Presbyterian to Unitarian,' in Bolam *et al*, *The English Presbyterians*, pp. 219-286. For the Anglican dimension see, John Gascoigne, 'Anglican Latitudinarianism, Rational Dissent and political radicalism in the late eighteenth century,' in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 219-240..

onwards.⁵ This progress was believed to be taking place under divine direction and through human agency, and reflected the inherent capacity for human beings to understand and obey the will of God. The materialist and necessarian philosophy-theology which Joseph Priestley so influentially proposed underlined the overarching operation of divine Providence and the ways in which humanity functioned within this plan.⁶ Understanding these related strands of thought is crucial, as they formed the underlying rationale of Unitarian gender ideology.

In 1771 Priestley produced a general exposition of what became the dominant Unitarian theological position. He rejected the central orthodox Christian doctrines of Original Sin, the Trinity and the Atonement on the grounds that they were agreeable to neither reason nor Revelation. Employing human reason in the quest to uncover the truths of Scriptural revelation was wholly appropriate because:

They both proceed from the same God and Father of us all, who is the giver of every good and every perfect gift. They cannot, therefore, be contrary to one another, but must mutually illustrate and enforce one another. ... The plainest and most obvious sense of the scriptures is in favour of those doctrines which are most agreeable to reason.⁷

The urgency with which Unitarians advocated the application of reason to Scripture stemmed from the belief that neither the capacity of the human mind for understanding nor Biblical revelation were static and unchanging. Simultaneously and gradually, as the former expanded so the latter unfolded, as all areas of knowledge were part of a unified whole. The liberal Anglican layman, David Hartley, whose work on the operation of the human mind greatly influenced the development of Priestley's theology, asserted that God had designed secular and religious knowledge to advance in parallel. In 1749 he wrote: '[T]he Dispensations recorded in the Scriptures have been, as far as we can judge, perfectly suited to the States of the World at the Time when these Dispensations were made respectively; *i.e.* to the improvement of Mankind in Knowledge.'⁸ This analysis had been embraced by the emerging Rational Dissent of the 1760s. For example, John Taylor, a Presbyterian tutor with Unitarian tendencies at the dissenting academy at Warrington, contended that it was God's intention to advance religious

⁵David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-century Britain*, (New Haven, 1990), ch. 6, especially pp. 223-252.

⁶For a good introduction to Priestley's system see Webb, 'The Unitarian background,' pp. 9-13.

⁷[Joseph Priestley,] *An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity* (Leeds, 1771), pp. 4-6.

⁸David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, (2 vols., 1749, reprinted Hildesheim, 1967), ii, p. 187.

knowledge at any given period in time to the highest peak which the human condition would allow. Scriptural dispensations were ‘adapted to the then capacities and improvements, the moral state and circumstances of mankind.’⁹ The late eighteenth-century leaders of Unitarianism proper promulgated the simultaneous progress of secular and scriptural knowledge as a cardinal belief, and one through which to defend their heterodox theological position. Priestley asserted that as more became known of human nature it would become increasingly clear ‘how admirably is the whole system of revealed religion adapted to the nature and circumstances of man.’ Moreover, in the Unitarian system alone was there a perfect reconciliation of religion and philosophy, with discoveries made in the latter field perfectly demonstrating the admirable precepts of the former.¹⁰ A similar line of argument was advanced later in the century by Thomas Belsham, an ardent disciple of Priestley’s, in his criticism of Wilberforce’s *Practical View*. Belsham refuted as absurd Wilberforce’s opinion that, notwithstanding advances in almost all other areas of knowledge, England was experiencing a deep-rooted decline in religious knowledge. On the contrary, Belsham argued, consonant with the general climate of improvement ‘the industry of men of learning and integrity’ throughout the century had produced such advances in understanding of the Scriptures as to render Christianity, ‘plain, simple, rational, every way worthy of God, and established upon a basis of evidence, internal and external, which no sophistry can evade or malignity divert.’¹¹

There was a general perception among rationalists, which came to a head in Unitarianism, that human knowledge and culture were moving along an all-encompassing trajectory of progress. As things temporal and spiritual could be shown to have advanced in tandem in the past, it was reasonable to expect that they would continue to do so in the future. David Spadafora has shown that the conceptualization of general progress as a phenomenon effecting all areas of human life both in the past and indefinitely into the future was a characteristic and distinctive feature of English Enlightenment thought, especially from the 1760s onwards, and he identifies Priestley as one of the key figures who fostered and

⁹John Taylor, *A Scheme of Scripture Divinity* (1762); quoted in Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress*, p. 96.

¹⁰Joseph Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* (London, 1777), p. xv.

¹¹Thomas Belsham, *A Review of Mr Wilberforce’s Treatise Entitled A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians &c.*, in *Letters to a Lady* (London, 1798), pp.203–4. Belsham’s remarks highlight strikingly the gulf between Unitarianism and evangelicalism, in this case in their interpretation of the phrase ‘religious knowledge.’

disseminated this belief.¹² The Enlightenment in Scotland also influenced Unitarian attitudes (for instance, Priestley acknowledged his intellectual debt to David Hume in the development of his theology¹³), and as will be seen later, the works which some philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment produced on women were incorporated by Unitarians into their discourses on gender and femininity. However, in both their view of progress and in their discussions of the meaning of gender, the English Unitarians assumed a more radical stance than prevailed among Scottish thinkers. In terms of progress, the Scots engaged more in recollection than in foresight, and rarely thought in terms of an indefinite temporal range for improvement.¹⁴ For Priestley himself, the belief in past and future capacity for human progress was inextricably bound up with his necessarian view of the operation of divine Providence:

We ourselves, complex as the structures of our mind and our principles of action are, are links in the great connected chain, parts of an immeasurable whole, a very little of which we are yet permitted to see, but from which we collect evidence enough, the whole system (in which we are at the same time both *instruments* and *objects*) is under an unerring direction, and that the final result will be most glorious and happy.¹⁵

The universe was under the direction of a loving and benevolent God, guiding it towards ultimate perfection, and human beings were the medium through which the divine plan was being executed on earth. The moral perfection of humanity would be achieved as God gradually revealed to their expanding reason more information which would enable them to act in perfect obedience to the divine will.¹⁶

Whilst not all Unitarians embraced Priestley's necessarianism, particularly those of his

¹²Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress*, pp. 223-252.

¹³Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*, p. xxi. John Dwyer's study of the moral writings of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers reveals that there were significant theological similarities in, for example, the view of divine Providence articulated by Moderates like Hugh Blair in the Scottish Church, to those which contemporary English Unitarians held. John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: sensibility and community in late eighteenth-century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 49-50.

¹⁴Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress*, p. 254.

¹⁵Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*, p. viii.

¹⁶For a discussion of the way in which Priestley's progressive theology informed his ideas on other areas of life see Alan Tapper, 'Priestley on politics, progress and moral philosophy,' in Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion*, pp. 272-311; John Money, 'Joseph Priestley in cultural context: philosophic spectacle, popular belief and popular politics in eighteenth-century Birmingham,' Part 1, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 7 (1988), pp. 57-81, Part 2, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 8 (1989), pp. 69-89. The way in which the optimistic, progressive perspective which Rational Dissenters held shaped their practical activities is also discussed in Mark Philp, 'Rational religion and political radicalism,' *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 3 (1985), especially pp. 35-46.

own generation and most famously his friend and correspondent Richard Price,¹⁷ there was thoroughgoing acceptance of the idea of ongoing progress in human culture. The writings of the prominent Unitarian layman, the physician, scholar and author, John Aikin, illustrate this outlook well. In a series of letters written to his son, Arthur, which were published in 1794 Aikin treated on a wide variety of subjects, including the past and future capacity for human improvement across all areas of life. He confirmed his belief in the superiority of modern over classical culture:

Without hesitation I avow, that the supposition that any kind of intellectual product will not partake of the general improvement of the mind, under similar circumstances, appears to me perfectly unphilosophical. ... [M]odern times, in extent and accuracy of knowledge, have far surpassed those perhaps that ought rather to be regarded as the *infancy* than the *antiquity* of the world.¹⁸

And on the question of future prospects for improvement he assured Arthur that, contrary to the cant of those who maintained that the human condition did not admit of the possibility of advancement on earth, perfection was the point constantly to be aimed at as, 'no pursuit beneficial to mankind has hitherto been brought to a state in which it is incapable of further progress.'¹⁹

A fundamental pre-condition for the general progress of human life in both its secular and religious dimensions was believed to be the perfect freedom of exchange of ideas. This process fostered the expansion of knowledge, enabled the findings of science to be applied to Scripture and encouraged the constant refinement of ideas. As Martin Fitzpatrick has shown, the belief that scriptural truths would only be uncovered when everyone had absolute liberty to exercise their own reason on questions of faith was at the root of rationalist demands for complete religious freedom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁰ It was in order to encourage such freedom of enquiry and debate that Priestley founded the *Theological*

¹⁷For the reception which necessarianism received among older Unitarians of the late eighteenth century, compared with the unbounded enthusiasm of the following generation, see Webb, 'The Unitarian background,' pp. 12-13. In the 1770s Priestley and Price engaged in an epistolary exchange in which they debated their differing views on materialism and necessity. Joseph Priestley (ed.), *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, in Correspondence Between Dr Price and Dr Priestley* (London, 1778).

¹⁸John Aikin, 'On attachment to the ancients,' in his *Letters from a Father to his Son, on Various Topics Relative to Literature and the Conduct of Life* (London, 1794), pp. 27-8.

¹⁹John Aikin, 'On the pursuit of improvement,' in *Letters from a Father*, p. 39.

²⁰Fitzpatrick, 'Toleration and truth,' pp. 3-31. See also Philp, 'Rational religion and political radicalism,' pp. 36-8.

Repository in 1769. In the editorial to the first issue, Priestley asked for all discoveries from the fields of science and literature which shed light on theological matters to be communicated to others via the periodical. Consciously displaying the liberality of mind on which Unitarians prided themselves, he urged deists too to contribute their ideas, reassuring his Christian readers that true religion would be able to stand the test of the severest examination: 'And no friend of truth will say, that we ought to cherish the least partiality for a system which will not bear examination.'²¹ In the address which he made to his parishioners on leaving the Anglican Church, the Unitarian denomination's founding martyr of conscience, Theophilus Lindsey, testified to the need for free and impartial enquiry in order to move closer to the discovery of truth. 'We may assure ourselves,' he said, 'that no discovery of error, no false representation of facts, can hurt true religion. ... We ought rather to be the more excited to search and inquire.'²²

As Ruth Watts has demonstrated, the emphasis which Unitarians placed on the cultivation of reason as humanity's key to moral perfection led them to formulate a progressive agenda of educational initiatives, both in theory and in practice. Unitarian educational psychology drew heavily on David Hartley's theory of the association of ideas. This theory argued that the individual human mind began as a 'blank sheet', and that complex and intellectual ideas arose from the association of simpler ones, which in turn originated in impressions received from the world around. Thus all human beings, female as well as male, shared the potential for a high level of moral and mental development if the impressions to which they were exposed were carefully and properly regulated towards achieving that end.²³ Watts provides a clear discussion of the ways in which this educational impulse prompted Unitarians to develop schemes for the education of both sexes which were often far in advance of those which generally prevailed in wider contemporary society.²⁴ However, her tendency to focus on Unitarian's associationist psychology as the basis for their practical educational initiatives obscures a related but much more radical and distinctly Unitarian concept embedded within their gender ideology. Analysis of their interpretation of the meaning of gender, especially as it was formulated before about 1810, reveals the belief that relations between the sexes constituted an important site where the pace at which human culture as a whole would

²¹*Theological Repository*, 1 (1769), p. xi.

²²Theophilus Lindsey, *Apology on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick in Yorkshire* (1773; reprinted London, 1888), p. 69.

²³Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England* (London, 1998), especially pp. 33-52.

²⁴*Ibid.*, *passim*.

advance was determined. In order to secure future progress, it was argued, these must be established on the basis of the mental and moral equality of women and men.

Gender, knowledge and the pursuit of virtue

In 1774 the authoress Anna Laetitia Aikin, later Mrs Barbauld, was solicited by 'some distinguished persons ... to establish under their auspices what might almost have been called a college for young ladies.' Aikin declined. Among the reasons which she gave for doing so, she asserted that,

[Y]oung ladies, who ought only to have such a general tincture of knowledge as to make them agreeable companions to men of sense, and to enable them to find rational entertainment for a solitary hour, should gain these accomplishments in a quiet, unobserved manner. ... The best way for a woman to acquire knowledge is from conversation with a father, a brother, or friend, in the way of family intercourse and easy conversation ... and perhaps such a set of lectures as Mr Ferguson's which it is not uncommon for ladies to attend.²⁵

Aikin's response neatly encapsulates several of the key themes which ran through the denomination's conceptualization of femininity and gender relations. The primary location of women's concerns was viewed in domestic terms, and the stimulus to mental cultivation was centred upon their expected familial relationships. But recognition of these limitations should not obscure the progressive possibilities within Aikin's comments. Women were to have access to the world of liberal education, both in and outside the home, to enable the creation of a rational domestic sphere based on the mutual companionship and shared rational society of the spouses. As the conceptualization of woman as companion to 'man of sense' underlines, Unitarian ideas on the nature, status and roles of women were overwhelmingly conceived in terms which evoked an ideal model of gender relations and which assumed a standard of masculinity among men. Clearly, therefore, the particular views which Unitarians espoused about the position of women cannot be understood outside the conceptual context of the overall gender ideology in which they were framed and apart from the denominational ideal of masculinity - the 'man of sense'.

²⁵Lucy Aikin, *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, with a Memoir* (2 vols; London, 1825), i, p. xviii. It is not possible to be certain about the identity of 'Mr Ferguson,' but in view of Barbauld's Scottish friendships, this might be a reference to Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), Professor of Natural and Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University.

At its heart, and consistent with the belief that enlightened human reason held the key to progress and happiness, the Unitarian ideal of manliness stressed the possession of a cultivated and independent intellect. So endowed, men would be enabled to fulfil their intended role as the instruments of divine Providence on earth. Rational and useful, they would be in the vanguard of the quest for advancement and improvement across all areas of life, acting to promote the best interests of society and the nation.

The Unitarian conceptualization of the ideal man as an intellectual individual, whose on-going efforts to expand his mental horizons were actuated by the desire to understand and promote the progressive plan of Providence, is well-illustrated by the representations of the denomination's ministers which appeared in the posthumously-published memoirs and autobiographies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Ruth Symes observes, a distinguishing feature of the memoirs of Unitarian men from that period was the emphasis which they placed on tracing the 'life of the mind' of their subjects.²⁶ The ministers whose histories were charted in these works were the movement's leaders and exemplars, and the portrayals of their lives were intended to serve two main functions. First, they were prescriptive, being designed to inspire imitation in their readers.²⁷ Secondly, they were one means through which the effort could be made to vindicate Unitarian beliefs and practices.²⁸ The ministers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the first generations to head this openly heterodox and widely reviled denomination. Many came from orthodox backgrounds and had personally made the decision to follow the path of heresy, so delineating the extent and nature of the intellectual endeavour which preceded their adoption of Unitarianism was crucial. Doing so served both to justify their own actions and to

²⁶Ruth Symes, 'Educating women: the preceptress and her pen, 1780-1820,' University of York DPhil thesis (1995), p. 230.

²⁷For example, Thomas Belsham wrote the memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey in order to 'exhibit the picture of an eminently virtuous, pious and disinterested mind in circumstances of great difficulty and perplexity, as an example to others ..., and as an encouragement to sacrifice every secular consideration in the cause of religious truth.' Similarly, Catharine Cappe published a memoir of her late husband, Newcome, in the hope that, 'the piety and virtue which adorned his character may excite an interest favourable to their imitation.' Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.: including a brief analysis of his works, together with anecdotes and letters of eminent persons, his friends and correspondents, and a general view of the progress of the Unitarian doctrine in England and America* (London, 1812), pp. v-vi; Catharine Cappe, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Newcome Cappe, formerly prefixed to two volumes of critical dissertations, and now republished with additions* (York, 1820), p. i.

²⁸For example, Priestley's eldest son edited his father's autobiography for publication expressly because he believed that, 'it affords a striking proof of the value of rational Christianity, adopted upon mature reflection and practised with habitual perseverance.' [Joseph Priestley,] *Memoir of the Reverend Doctor Joseph Priestley to the Year 1795, Written by Himself: with a continuation to the time of his decease. written by his son, Joseph Priestley* (London, 1809), p. i.

demonstrate that belief in the Unitarian system was the inevitable conclusion of the truly impartial, enlightened enquirer after truth. Chronicling in detail the changes in their religious convictions so as to demonstrate their disinterested scholarliness was thus an indispensable narrative strand in autobiographical and biographical accounts. Within this narrative, the foremost concern was to demonstrate that Unitarianism had not been embraced lightly, nor as a result of either irrational enthusiasm at one extreme or infidelity or religious indifference at the other. Rather, their new code of faith and practice was founded on unbiased, rational and painstaking individual enquiry, and a deep commitment to adhere to the religious truths contained in Scripture. So, for example, when John Kentish wrote the biographical memoir of his late friend, Timothy Kenrick, he recorded that Kenrick had become convinced of the Unitarian position only after, 'deeper study of the Scriptures, away from all secular works, convinced him that Christ was ... simply of the human race, though highly distinguished by the Deity, beyond all former messengers and prophets.'²⁹ The unfettered candour with which ministers apparently sought and found religious truth in Unitarianism was strikingly depicted in the case of Thomas Belsham. In 1789 he resigned the principalship of the orthodox dissenting academy at Daventry because the Unitarian views which he had gradually come to hold made it impossible for him to fulfil the demands of the post. The compiler of Belsham's memoirs included the valedictory address which he gave to the students, and which contained the following reflection:

This change of system did not suddenly take place. I even entered upon my inquiries with a firm persuasion that I should with ease be able to baffle the arguments of Unitarianism by the declarations of Scripture. I flattered myself that I might be of some considerable use in checking the progress of a doctrine which I considered erroneous in its principles and mischievous in its consequences.³⁰

The quest for greater understanding of divine revelation did not end, though, with the adoption of Unitarianism.. A substantial part of the memoirs of almost all Unitarian ministers is devoted to analysing in detail the ongoing efforts which they made to sustain the progress which they had made in knowledge. For many, carrying out rigorous biblical exegesis was central to this end. Catharine Cappe, for example, described how for her husband, Newcome, rationally-guided Bible study became his life's work:

²⁹John Kentish (ed.), *An Exposition of the Historical Writings of the New Testament, with Reflections subjoined to each Section, by the Late Reverend Timothy Kenrick, with a Memoir of the Author*, second ed. (London and York, 1824), pp. xiv-xv.

³⁰John Williams, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Thomas Belsham* (London, 1833), p. 390.

it is literally true that he experienced more delight of heart in the elucidation of an obscure passage, in removing a difficulty or reconciling an apparent contradiction, than he would have done if put in the possession of every thing which the children of the world consider as most desirable.³¹

Few ministers, though, were depicted as exclusively engrossed in Scriptural studies. Their concern to promote progress across all areas of religious and secular culture was underlined by demonstrating the wide array of other intellectual, investigative and improving activities in which they engaged. For example, the national reputation which William Wood of Leeds enjoyed as a geologist was highlighted throughout his biography.³²

The ideal of manliness which emerges from these memoirs is one based on scholarliness and intellectual independence, stimulated by the drive to promote the progress of society. This model of masculinity was not only applied to ministers, however, and the forming of such paragons in both the ministry and the laity underpinned the perspective which Unitarians adopted in relation to male education. At the various academies for the higher education of men which existed under Unitarian auspices during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and at which lay and divinity students were taught side by side, a groundbreaking curriculum of liberal education was formulated which encompassed theology, sciences, humanities, classical and modern languages and literature. Through this system, they envisaged the creation of a class of men fit to stand as leaders at the head of an emergent powerful and cultured middle class. Such innovative leadership was seen as vital to sustain the momentum of national progress in the new context of an evolving industrial and commercial society. The traditional curriculum of education offered in grammar and public schools and in the English universities appeared woefully inadequate to supply this want, having failed to keep pace with either the innovations in or the changing demands of the world around.³³ In the discourse delivered by Priestley in 1791 in support of the non-doctrinal dissenting academy established by a group of leading Unitarians at Hackney, he emphasised the crucial link between intellectual development and progress. The aim of the College, he urged, was to form men of cultivated, independent and unprejudiced minds, who would be

³¹Cappe, *Memoirs of Newcome Cappe*, p. 77.

³²Charles Wellbeloved, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Late Reverend William Wood, F.R.S., and Minister at the Protestant Dissenting Chapel at Mill Hill in Leeds* (London, 1809).

³³For a discussion of the pioneering approach of Unitarians to men's higher education, and their agenda for the creation of a new social leadership, see Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London, 1998), pp. 56-69; Smith (ed.) *Truth, Liberty and Religion*; John Seed, 'Manchester College, York: a nineteenth-century Dissenting Academy,' *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 14 (1982), pp. 9-17.

both qualified and inspired to take an active part in spearheading the quest for improvement across the spectrum of human culture: 'in science, in arts, in government, in morals and in religion.'³⁴ Charles Wellbeloved clearly enunciated the progressive scholarliness which was the very essence of the Unitarian ideal of masculinity. Wellbeloved was principal of the main dissenting academy run by Unitarians during the early nineteenth century, Manchester College at York, where the leading figures within the denomination, both clerical and lay, were educated. At the end of the academic year in 1810, he delivered a sermon to the departing students in which he set out the leisure pursuits which were appropriate for young men who had received a liberal education. The activities which he suggested were: the acquisition of religious knowledge through critical examination of the Scriptures; explorations into science and the laws of nature; and the study of mental and moral philosophy, art and literature. These were overwhelmingly cerebral pastimes, advocated as 'never-failing sources of pure enjoyment' which would facilitate 'intellectual improvement,' render their practitioners 'useful members of society' and strengthen the 'manly fortitude' of their minds.³⁵

For Unitarian laymen, many of whom were engaged in the middling class occupations of trade, commerce and manufacture,³⁶ and for ministers who often received only meagre salaries on which they had to maintain a respectable appearance,³⁷ a cultivated intellect served to confer the 'gentleman' status which their occupations and financial situation respectively would otherwise have denied them. It was in relation to this intellectually progressive ideal of masculinity that the Unitarian construction of femininity was fashioned.

A common approach employed by Unitarians wishing to expound their ideal of femininity was to point to individuals belonging to the community who were or who had been paragons of womanhood. In the obituary of Elizabeth Coltman of Leicester, for example, which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* in 1811 the authoress Catharine Hutton recalled that her friend had been, 'Born with endowments that might have distinguished her from the rest of her sex, and qualified her to shine in a literary circle,' although she 'devoted the whole time after her marriage to the service of her Maker and the duties of her family.'³⁸ Similarly, the

³⁴Joseph Priestley, *The Proper Objects of Education in the Present State of the World* (London, 1791).

³⁵Charles Wellbeloved, *Objects of Pursuit Proper for Young Persons who have Received a Liberal Education* (York, 1811).

³⁶Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians*, pp. 63-6.

³⁷Seed, 'The formation of liberal culture,' pp. 283-299.

³⁸Quoted in Catherine Hutton Beale, *Catherine Hutton and her Friends* (Birmingham, 1895), p. 151.

published memoirs of the denomination's ministers generally carried a brief account of the subjects' wives which affirmed their worthiness as consorts to the movement's leaders. So, for instance, Charles Wellbeloved's wife, Anne, was described by Wellbeloved's biographer and son-in-law, John Kenrick, as

a woman of amiable disposition, of cultivated mind and polished manners, devoted to her children and beloved by them, and well-fitted, by an even, calm and yet cheerful temper to be a helpmate to a husband more susceptible of fluctuation of spirits, more liable to be disturbed by passing events.³⁹

Joseph Priestley's description of his wife, Mary, as

a woman of excellent understanding, much improved by reading, of great fortitude and strength of mind, and of a temper in the highest degree affectionate and intelligent. Also, greatly excelling in everything relating to household affairs.⁴⁰

was retained in his published memoir by the couple's son. The common theme which emerges in each of these three examples is that the two important qualities to be combined in an ideal woman were one the one hand attachment to and competency in her domestic duties, and on the other hand cultivation of mind and manners. Indeed, what made these women exemplars of their sex, religious denomination and social background was the very way in which they were able to fuse conventional female domestic capabilities with striking intellectual talent.

These depictions of women who represented the denominational ideal reflect issues central to the writings of Unitarians who explicitly contemplated the relationship between the sexes. Addressing the question from a perspective informed by Unitarianism's progressive, intellectual, theology, they were interested to explore the implications for gender relations, which they usually characterised in terms of marriage, of the assumption that rationally-driven progress was possible across all areas of human culture. Through these explorations, a model of gender relations was constructed which stressed not only that marriage was, to quote the prominent nineteenth-century minister Robert Aspland, 'a union of equals,'⁴¹ in which men and women had the same mental and moral capacity, but also that a marriage which fostered the spouses' combined and equal talents itself contributed to the further improvement of

³⁹John Kenrick, *A Biographical Memoir of the Late Reverend Charles Wellbeloved* (London, 1860), p. 144.

⁴⁰Priestley, *Autobiography*, p. 41.

⁴¹Robert Aspland, *The Beneficial Influence of Christianity on the Character and Condition of the Female Sex* (London, 1812), p. 4.

humanity.

The egalitarian and progressive view which Unitarians held of marriage owed much to their rejection of the orthodox theological position which emphasised the inherently 'fallen' state of humanity. Their Anglican evangelical contemporaries such as William Wilberforce and Hannah More, for example, argued that the whole system of Christianity was founded upon the doctrine of the Fall and consequent punishment of Adam and Eve. More stressed that these events had brought about a divinely ordained and immutable sexual hierarchy in which women were essentially subordinate and from which it was impossible to escape in the present life.⁴² In contrast, the Unitarian belief that God was guiding a system of human culture in which improvement was possible across all areas of life precluded acceptance of the notion that any such unalterable and hence limiting dispensation could exist, and this position had special implications for women. For instance, as Priestley and his friend William Willets, the Unitarian minister at Newcastle under Lyme, discussed incidentally in an exchange of letters on the Pauline Epistles in the *Theological Repository* in 1771, the suggestion that women were inferior on the basis that 'Adam was first formed and Eve first transgressed' was both unreasonable and unfounded in Scripture.⁴³ Unitarians looked instead to the story of the Creation in order to discern God's original intention regarding relations between men and women. There, they found clear evidence that the sexes enjoyed 'near relation and equality to each other,' and that far from being subservient to man, woman was designed to be, 'a help meet, or rational associate.'⁴⁴ Furthermore, as Mary Hays - a Unitarian writer who adopted an explicitly feminist stance - argued, it was irrational to suggest that the punishment of subservient status pronounced on Eve for her part in the transgression of 'our first parents' was eternally binding when that on Adam of manual labour clearly was not.⁴⁵ The domination of women by men was both a symbol of humanity's disunity with God's plan, and potentially

⁴²Hannah More stressed that the Atonement of Christ had initiated the possibility for universal salvation, and in that respect had placed women on a footing of *spiritual* equality with men, but she also represented this spiritual equality as both consolation for and justification of women's inferior status to men during their life on earth. Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (2 vols., 1799; reprinted Oxford, 1995); ii, pp. 31-2, 254-5; Wilberforce, *Practical View*, pp. 1940. On the importance of the doctrine of the Fall in shaping evangelical attitudes towards the status of women see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987), pp. 116-8.

⁴³TR, 3 (1771), pp. 198, 471.

⁴⁴Priestley, *Notes on the Books of Scripture* (1803), in John Towill Rutt (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley: with notes by the editor* (25 vols. in 26, London, 1817-32), xi, p.48.

⁴⁵Mary Hays, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of Women* (1798; reprinted London, 1974), pp. 3-7.

acted as a barrier to further progress in society.⁴⁶

Having established on the basis of Scripture and reason that men and women had been created with equal status the way was opened for Unitarians to subject the relations between the sexes, with the emphasis on the position of women, to scrutiny in light of their belief in progressive divine Providence. In charting the past progress of the condition of women their approach was informed by two contemporary strands of thought. First, and in common with other Christian groups, they maintained that Christianity had been instrumental in raising the status of women. A contributor to the *Monthly Repository*, for example, argued that the early Christian church had attracted a greater number converts among women than men because 'the genius of Christianity tended immediately to raise the female sex, which had hitherto been cruelly degraded.'⁴⁷ This theme was developed in considerable detail in an 1812 sermon by Robert Aspland which was subsequently published. Aspland sought to demonstrate how the examples and precepts of Christ had initiated a new era of equality and happiness in the status and condition of women. The cruel, superstitious and degrading practices to which they had been subjected in other civilisations were eradicated, whilst numerous blessings were dispensed which had particular importance for women: the institution of lifelong monogamy protected their virtue; motherhood was dignified; the spirit of benevolence which Christianity enjoined 'guarded the[ir] privileges and protected the[ir] comfort'; they enjoyed perfect freedom of conscience in religion; a system of virtuous behaviour was enjoined which gave them respectability, and, as the duties on which Christianity was founded were moral rather than ceremonial, they could be performed equally by both sexes.⁴⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly, though, Aspland did identify gradations in the treatment of women even within those countries governed under a Christian dispensation. It was in places like Protestant Britain, where Christianity was most studied, where the New Testament was freely available and where, 'the right of interpreting it for himself [*sic*] is vindicated to each individual,' that the most benign

⁴⁶The perception of sexual inequality as in itself transgressive of the divine plan had been articulated by Hartley, who argued, 'The Authority of Man is only a Mark of our present degenerate State... . Suppose the Sexes to share all their Joys and Grievs perfectly, to have an intire [*sic*] Concern for each other, and especially for each other's eternal Welfare, and they are, as it were, reinstated in Paradise, and the Dominion of the Man over the Woman, with her Subjection and consequent Reluctance, can only take place again upon their mutual Transgression.' *Observations on Man*, II, p. 301. In 1814, sixty-five years after this passage was first published, 'A Wife wrote to the Unitarian periodical, the *Monthly Repository*, recommending it to other readers for representing, the dearest connection of human life in its most just and amiable form.' *MR*, 9 1814 , pp. 36-7.

⁴⁷*MR*, 6 (1811), p. 33. The evangelical Anglican writer, Hannah More, for instance also argued that Christianity had elevated the position of women, by offering to them an equal possibility with men for salvation. *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, II, pp 31-2

⁴⁸Aspland, *The Beneficial Influence of Christianity*

effects of its influence were felt by women.⁴⁹ Unitarian writers also pointed to the excellence of Anglo-centric Protestant Christianity revealed in women's intellectual achievements. Anna Barbauld, Hannah More and Elizabeth Hamilton, for instance, were held up as testaments to both the dignifying and cultivating power of this religious system for women, and the intellectual and moral superiority of the contemporary society which had nurtured their genius.⁵⁰

Secondly, Unitarians drew heavily on the methodology used in the social anthropological investigations pioneered by writers of the Scottish Enlightenment in their discussions of progress in gender relations. The underlying intellectual concern of those who contributed to the debates of the Scottish Enlightenment was to construct a science of humanity in order to understand better the workings and possibilities of contemporary society. Crucial to this project was the study of 'man' as both a social and a sociable being.⁵¹ Furthermore, the increasing knowledge which was becoming available in Europe about social structures and institutions existing elsewhere in the world, especially those in North America and Asia, led to the construction of a progressive history of civilization from the savage, through pastoral and agricultural, to the industrial and commercial stages. In the process of reconstructing the social histories of cultures and civilisations the traditional boundaries of gender and genre between 'masculine' history and 'feminine' novel became blurred as the study of manners and social morality were integrated with political discourses into overarching 'philosophical histories.'⁵² It was within this context of a widening investigative approach that some writers turned their attention to look in a comparative way at the history of the family, and within it at the position and condition of women. In doing so, the relations between the sexes, and especially the status and roles accorded to women, came to be represented as an accurate measure of the position along the sliding scale of civilization which

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

⁵⁰*MR*, 9 (1814), pp. 650-1.

⁵¹Jane Rendall, 'Introduction,' in *idem.* (ed.), William Alexander, *The History of Women from the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time* (2 vols., 1779; reprinted Bristol, 1995), i, p. iii; Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: a social history* (London, 1976), p. 6.

⁵²On the merging of the gendered genres of history and novel see Mark Sabler Philips, "'If Mrs Mure be not sorry for poor King Charles": history, the novel and the sentimental reader,' *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997), pp. 111-131. For an instance of the way in which this transformation facilitated the writing by women of 'philosophical histories' see Jane Rendall, 'Writing history for British women: Elizabeth Hamilton and the *Memoirs of Agrippina*,' in Clarissa Campbell-Orr (ed.), *Wollstonecraft's Daughters: womanhood in England and France, 1780-1820* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 79-93.

any society had reached.⁵³ Thus, for example, John Millar, professor of civil law at Glasgow university for forty years from 1761, argued in the opening chapter of his *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* that those passions which regulated the union of the sexes were the most susceptible to variation under different circumstances, and so, 'in different ages and countries have produced the greatest diversity of manners and customs.'⁵⁴ Tracing the progress 'Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages' through the four established stages of civilization Millar found that, 'every circumstance which tends to create more attention to the pleasures of sex, and to increase the value of those occupations that are suited to the female character,' fostered improvement in the condition of women.⁵⁵ In general terms, advancement in women's status and treatment could be tracked which was commensurate with the progress of civilization. So, in industrial and commercial societies women were valued for their useful accomplishments and domestic virtues, as 'neither the slaves nor the idols of the other sex, but the friends and companions.'⁵⁶ Such a situation was evident in ancient Greece, although that society lacked the 'delicacy and politeness' which were evident in some modern European states which had reached the zenith of progress to date.⁵⁷ Millar did express anxiety, though, about the possibility that the spread of luxury and opulence brought about by further commercial expansion might have a detrimental impact on the position of women.⁵⁸

Unitarian writers drew on these two approaches in their analysis of the past progress

⁵³Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (London, 1985), pp. 21-32; Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Enlightenment debate on women,' *History Workshop Journal*, 20 (1985), pp. 101-124. Kathryn Gleadle traces a line of descent from the Enlightenment histories which pointed to the 'enslaved' condition of women in so-called savage societies, through mainstream Unitarian thought of the early nineteenth century, to inform crucially the radical Unitarian conception of contemporary British women enduring a form of slavery based on their lack of the right of self-determination. *The Early Feminists: radical unitarians and the emergence of the women's rights movement, 1831-51* (London, 1995), pp. 62-70.

⁵⁴John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (3rd ed., 1779); reprinted in William C. Lehmann, *John Millar of Glasgow (1735-1801): his life and thought and his contribution to sociological analysis* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 183. For a careful analysis of the complex heritage and strands of Miller's thought see Michael Ignatieff, 'John Millar and individualism,' in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 317-343.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 222-228.

⁵⁸'It should seem, however that there are certain limits beyond which it is impossible to push the real improvements arising from wealth and opulence. In a simple age, the free intercourse of the sexes is attended with no bad consequences; but in opulent and luxurious nations it gives rise to licentious and dissolute manners ... The natural tendency, therefore, of great luxury and dissipation is to diminish the rank and dignity of the women, by preventing all refinement in their connection with the other sex, and rendering them only subservient to the purposes of animal enjoyment.' *Ibid.*, p. 225.

of the status and roles of women, as indeed Robert Aspland did in his sermon on women cited above. The claims which Aspland set out to illustrate the elevating effect of Christianity on women were underwritten by a preliminary discussion of the ways in which ‘Among whole nations, and for whole ages, we behold the sex degraded in ignominious bondage.’⁵⁹ In keeping with the distinctive, forward-oriented perspective of the English Enlightenment, though, other Unitarians added a further dimension to their analysis and considered the implications of the past and present condition of women in light of the supposed prospects for the indefinite future advancement of human culture as a whole. In doing so, they built upon the premise that the status and condition of women was intimately bound up with and could be used as an indicator of the overall state of society. However, they used this perspective as the basis not for a congratulatory exposition of current society but rather for a censure, highlighting the continued degradation of women and the need for improvement in their condition in order to future social progress. The message permeating these critiques was egalitarian, explicitly stating the capacity for both mental and moral equality and identity between women and men. Thence they envisaged possibilities in domesticity and domestic relationships which were more radical than those to be found in the contemporary discourses of other middle-class, Christian groups.

The ways in which these various approaches and strands of thought were drawn together by Unitarian writers are well illustrated in two separate works which were published around the turn of the eighteenth century. The first was a series of five ‘Letters on Women’ which appeared in the Unitarian periodical the *Universalist's Miscellany* during 1799 and 1800, and which were almost certainly written by the idiosyncratic itinerant missionary, Richard Wright.⁶⁰ The second was a poem in four parts published in 1810 entitled *Epistles on Women* written by Lucy Aikin of the prominent family of literary Dissenters, and addressed to her sister-in-law Anna, daughter of the radical Unitarian scholar Gilbert Wakefield.

Both Wright and Aikin employed approaches which located them within the tradition of writing characteristic of the Scottish *literati*. Announcing the intended scope of his project in the first letter, Wright proposed contributing, ‘a series of letters relating to females, their natural, capacities, education, manners, the important sphere they are intended to occupy in society, &c., &c., &c.’ in writing which he would make use of ‘scriptural, historical and

⁵⁹Aspland, *The Beneficial Influence of Christianity*, p. 4. For a fuller discussion of Aspland's methodological debt to the Scottish approach see Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, pp. 64-8.

⁶⁰The letters are signed ‘R. W.’, and Wright is identified as the author in Francis E. Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: the Monthly Repository, 1806-38* (Chapel Hill, 1944) p. 80.

philosophical matter, theoretical, practical and entertaining.’⁶¹ Lucy Aikin's drew even more explicitly on that tradition, using an analytical approach which was concerned to chart the historical evolution of the position of women in different stages of civilization. Outlining her project, she aimed:

To mark the effect of various codes, institutions, and states of manners, on the virtue and happiness of man, and the concomitant and proportional elevation or depression of woman in the scale of existence, is the general plan of this work.

In addition, she employed another technique common among contemporary Scottish historical writers known as conjectural history, in which evidence about contemporary ‘savage’ societies was used to construct a picture of similar communities in the past.⁶² Her approach was thus largely concerned with historical analysis as a basis for formulating future practice. Aikin's obvious debt to the Scottish tradition doubtless owed much to the educational background of her father, John, who attended Edinburgh University and was chiefly responsible for guiding Lucy's intellectual development. Indeed, this is simply an intimately traceable example of the way in which the ideas of Scottish academia filtered into English Unitarianism. Barred from Oxford and unable to graduate from Cambridge, many Unitarian scholars obtained part of their education from Scottish universities.⁶³ Despite the differences of genre and method between Wright's and Aikin's works the messages which they convey are strikingly similar: women were not being permitted to develop their full mental and moral potential, and as a result the whole of humanity was suffering.

The central thesis of both works was the assertion that, whatever benefits and blessings contemporary Englishwomen might enjoy, they remained tainted with moral degeneracy because they were denied an education which would develop their reason and enable them to attain that genuine virtue which could proceed from reason alone. Wright asserted that,

Woman ... has been strangely degraded in all parts of the world, and by such degradation deprived of that mental improvement which she might otherwise have attained, and rendered incapable of that usefulness in society of which she might

⁶¹*UM*, 3 (1799), p. 112.

⁶²Lucy Aikin, *Epistles on Women, Exemplifying their Character and Condition in Various Ages and Nations* (London, 1810), p. vii.

⁶³P.H. le Breton (ed.), *Memoirs, Miscellanies and Letters of the Late Lucy Aikin* (London, 1864), p. xix; Lucy Aikin, *Memoirs of John Aikin, M.D.* (London, 1823) p. 7. See also, for example, Cappe, *Memoir of Newcome Cappe*, p. 9.

otherwise have been.⁶⁴

Similarly, when Aikin, in the final part of her poem, turned to survey the present condition of women in England, she saw in the continued circumscription of their mental capacities, the traces of 'savage' suppression: 'That slavish stigma scar[r]ed on half the race.'⁶⁵ She exhorted an imaginary male audience, '...be generous then, unbind/ Your barbarous shackles, loose the female mind.'⁶⁶ With full and equal, if not necessarily identical, education women would be capable of the same virtues as men. Wright's recurrent theme throughout his letters was that the creation of woman as a 'help-meet' for man showed clearly her mental and moral equality with him. In order to fulfill that role it was clear that she must share with him 'mental capacities and intellectual endowments,' and be capable of 'the same knowledge, the same feelings, the same virtues, and the same enjoyments.'⁶⁷ He flatly rejected the notion of innate moral disparity between the sexes, arguing that any present deficiencies stemmed from faulty education rather than sexual difference. In defence of women, he remarked drily, 'the same ignorance, weakness of mind, vanity and frivolousness of manners are observable enough in many individuals of the other sex.'⁶⁸ He denounced those men who denied women access to knowledge and virtue and then satirised them as naturally deficient.⁶⁹ If women and men received a liberal education they would both attain 'the public virtues, and all those thoughts which dignify human nature and render man a blessing to his race.'⁷⁰ The gap in knowledge and in virtue between the sexes could and should be closed: 'the female mind is capable of the same culture and improvement, as that of the male, ... their souls are intended to mingle with each other, ... the more they resemble each other, in mental improvement, the greater will be their mutual happiness.'⁷¹

Lucy Aikin concurred. Using the Creation story as the starting point for her history of women, she asserted that the sexes were equal in the beginning; women's subjection took place

⁶⁴UM, 3 (1799), p. 112.

⁶⁵Aikin, *Epistles on Women*, p. 80.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶⁷UM, 3 (1799), p. 324. See also *ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶⁸UM, 4 (1800), p. 109.

⁶⁹UM, 3 (1799), pp. 112-3.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷¹UM, 4 (1800), p. 111.

as civilisation entered its first, savage, stage.⁷² In the introduction to the *Epistles*, she urged the case for women's intellectual development by pointing to the inherent moral parity between the sexes:

let the daily observation of mankind bear witness, that no talent, no virtue, is masculine alone; no fault or folly exclusively feminine; that there is not an endowment, or propensity, or mental quality of any kind, which may not be derived from her father to the daughter, to the son from his mother.⁷³

Other Unitarian writers shared these views. Lucy Aikin's ideas were apparently influenced by her father's: they certainly expressed similar sentiments. In the series of letters referred to earlier in this chapter which he addressed to his son, Arthur, John Aikin offered some advice on the kind of woman 'a man of sense' should seek when choosing a wife. He reminded Arthur that a wife was not a plaything, but a companion and helper: 'the intimate of all hours - the partaker of all fortunes - the sharer in pain and pleasure - the mother and instructress of your offspring.' Such a woman should have good sense and good temper, and, Aikin advised, her character should bear scrutiny by a common human standard of excellence:

I confess myself decidedly of the opinion of those who would rather form the two sexes to a resemblance of character, than contrast them. Virtue, wisdom, presence of mind, patience, vigour, capacity, application, are not *sexual* qualities, they belong to mankind - to all who have duties to perform and evils to endure.⁷⁴

Similarly, when Mary Hays reflected on the charge that the acquisition of knowledge would render women 'masculine', she asserted that, if by 'masculine' was meant a woman who 'emulates those virtues and accomplishments, which as common to human nature are common to both sexes,' then 'the attempt is natural, amiable and highly honourable to that woman, under whatever name her conduct may be disguised or censured.'⁷⁵ And Priestley observed: 'As to the natural or moral disposition, there is no intimation in the Scriptures or the writings of *Moses* of women being at all inferior to men.'⁷⁶

⁷²Aikin, *Epistles on Women*, p. 12.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁷⁴John Aikin, 'On the choice of a wife,' in *idem.*, *Letters from a Father*, p. 241.

⁷⁵Hays, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, pp. 173-4.

⁷⁶Joseph Priestley, *The Institutes of Moses and those of the Hindoos &c. Compared* (1799); Rutt (ed.), *Works*, xvii, p. 280.

The belief that women needed to attain the level of mental improvement which would enable them to develop moral equality with men was linked to Unitarians' grasp of the common Enlightenment tenet that social relationships acted as a key stimulus to the pursuit of further improvements in human knowledge and virtue. This theme was explored by, for example, William Wood, minister at Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds, who preached a series of twelve sermons on social life in the early 1770s. Wood described virtue as a form of property which could be transferred from one individual to another without any detriment to the original possessor. The key means by which it was diffused was by personal examples of virtuous behaviour exhibited in social intercourse. Public good accrued from the collective practice of this private virtue.⁷⁷ In the scale of social relations the most intimate, and hence the most potentially conducive to virtue, were those which existed between the sexes and which were fostered in the conjugal domestic sphere. Priestley apparently recommended marriage because it elevated personal morality by diverting thoughts away from the self and into more benevolent channels.⁷⁸ Richard Wright elaborated on this thesis in the following passage:

Man is a social creature, formed to receive and communicate felicity, to rise to a higher state of perfection and happiness by a reciprocity of duties and enjoyments. God himself saw it wisest and best to make women essential to the existence of human society. ... [I]t is very evident that without women no social blessings could have been enjoyed. The union of the sexes produces the strongest and tenderest ties of sociality and a constant interchange of duties which, if cheerfully and diligently performed, will produce a constant reciprocation of blessings. Hence it follows, that the union of the sexes upon right principles, is calculated to lead man to higher improvement and happiness.⁷⁹

Lucy Aikin too expressed such sentiments in her *Epistles*. In the penultimate verse she assumed the viewpoint of 'enlightened Man' who had been brought to realise the value of women equal in mind and morals, and the potential which a partnership of the sexes based on such shared understanding offered for future improvement:

My deepest thoughts, intelligent, divide;
When right confirm me, and when erring guide;

⁷⁷William Wood, *Sermons on Social Life*, (London, 1775).

⁷⁸Priestley's comments were quoted by a correspondent to William Frend on his marriage in 1808. Frida Knight, *University Rebel: the life of William Frend (1757-1841)* (London, 1971), p. 241.

⁷⁹*UM*, 3 (1799), p. 324. See also *ibid.*, p. 325.

Soothe all my cares, in all my virtues blend,
And be, my sister, be at length my friend.⁸⁰

Others agreed. The minister Lant Carpenter, for example, recorded his thoughts on marriage following his engagement in 1803. It was vital that men such as himself whose work and leisure pursuits were almost exclusively literary, should have a wife who was herself well-educated. 'If possessed of sound judgement,' he mused, 'she would not only heighten his pleasures by participating in them, but be frequently capable of correcting the influences which ... in the warmth of investigation would pass unheeded.' The latter role was particularly important because 'Progress and mutual improvement will seldom be accomplished without someone to excite to action.'⁸¹ Intellectual compatibility and fellowship between spouses was essential in order for the possibilities for future progress in knowledge and virtue to be fully exploited. The immense importance which Unitarians attached to the intellectual attainments of men demanded that women too should have mental cultivation. In the context of Unitarian understanding of the progressive potential of conjugal love, and of their ideal of masculinity, it is clear that the injunction to women to become agreeable companions to men of sense contained more radical potential than might initially appear.

Lucy Aikin underlined the implications for humanity as a whole of women's education by highlighting the fundamental barrier to progress which the failure to allow women's intellectual development would maintain. She warned that between men and women 'the most complete identity of interest subsists: so that it is impossible for man to degrade his companion without degrading himself'⁸² By implication, men who denied the mental and moral equality of women and prevented them from achieving their full potential, were compromising their own manliness, and this idea clearly had currency within Unitarian circles. For example, in a lecture which he delivered to the students of Manchester College Robert Aspland denounced, 'those irreverent men who deny the equality of women with men in intellectual powers.'⁸³ Similarly, a female correspondent to the *Monthly Repository* in 1814 objected to an extract from Milton which had been published in a previous number suggesting that women were created inferior to men. She wrote that she had been moved to complain because the piece

⁸⁰Aikin, *Epistles on Women*, pp. 80-1.

⁸¹Russell Lant Carpenter (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life of the Late Reverend Lant Carpenter, LL.D., with Selections from his Correspondence* (Bristol, 1842), p. 94 note.

⁸²Aikin, *Epistles on Women*, p. viii. Later in the work Aikin captured the same theme in verse: 'Man, stamp this moral on thy haughty mind:/ Degrade the sex, and thou degrad'st the kind!'. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁸³Robert Aspland, 'Lecture on Mrs Barbauld' (n.d.), p. 6. MSS Aspland 9, HMC..

was, 'in a strain so different from the manly and liberal sentiments which usually pervade your work.'⁸⁴ In the depictions of the lives of exemplary men, attention was often turned to the care which they had taken with, most often, their daughters' education. Charles Wellbeloved devoted fourteen pages of his memoir of William Wood to describing in detail the careful intellectual education which Wood had given to his daughter and a select group of her contemporaries.⁸⁵ And in the funeral sermon which Priestley preached and published for Robert Robinson, the radical Baptist minister at Cambridge, he singled out as especially worthy of imitation the way in which Robinson had given his sons and daughters an equal education, both religious and intellectual.⁸⁶

The equal capacity for reason and virtue which Unitarians accorded to women and men may help to explain why they do not appear to have displayed the negative attitude towards sexually mixed sociability described by Michele Cohen in her work on the use of conversation to cultivate masculine 'politeness.' Cohen argues that during most of the eighteenth century polite conversation with women was seen as an essential aspect of the education of a gentleman into the manners of polite society. In the 1790s, however, she identifies a change in attitudes towards women's conversation when it became regarded as a potentially dangerous enervating and emasculating influence on men's minds and morals. Quite the opposite view can be found, though, in Unitarian writings from that period. For example, in the early 1790s John Aikin offered his son advice on 'cheap pleasures' which would be both instructive and recreational. Alongside reading and the study of nature he recommended conversation, 'with the most cultivated and rational of both sexes, among whom decency of manners and variety of knowledge will always be valued.'⁸⁷ Cohen identifies the trend which she describes as part of a wider patriotic project aimed at re-defining the national male character, but it is not difficult to understand why Unitarians did not share the view that mixing socially with women would encourage effeminacy in men. Properly educated women could become men's mental and moral equals and shared social intercourse with them, far from constituting a threat to male integrity, functioned as an encouragement to the further and mutual pursuit of knowledge

⁸⁴MR, 9 (1814), p. 36.

⁸⁵Wellbeloved, *Memoir of William Wood*. pp. 68-82.

⁸⁶Joseph Priestley, *Reflections on Death: a sermon on the occasion of the death of the Reverend Robert Robinson of Cambridge*, in Rutt (ed.), *Works*, xv, pp. 418-9. For information on Robinson, his radicalism and relationship to Unitarianism, see Knight, *University Rebel*, pp. 63-7, 93-4..

⁸⁷'On cheap pleasures,' in *Letters from a Father*, pp. 288-95.

and virtue.⁸⁸

Unitarians who argued for women to be given a higher standard of education were careful to maintain that in advocating such a change of system they were not seeking to alienate women from the duties of their proper domestic sphere. As the representations of exemplary women cited earlier indicated, it was their ability to blend mental and domestic cultivation which was so laudable.⁸⁹ Richard Wright agreed that women's duties as wives and mothers and in everything relating to domestic economy were certainly vital parts of their training; but there was no reason to suppose that such instruction would clash with a liberal education.⁹⁰ Lucy Aikin too emphasised the naturally home-centred nature of women's lives.⁹¹ Certainly, limits might be set on the specific subjects which women should spend time and effort learning. Aikin's aunt, Anna Barbauld, for example, expressed the view that, as every woman was destined to become 'a wife, a mother, a mistress of a family,' they required a liberal education which would make them rational domestic companions and competent educators of their children; they therefore had no business studying the more technical workings of politics, physic or theology.⁹² Barbauld based her qualification, though, on the rationale that men only learned such things in order to fulfil whatever might be their particular professional occupation in life, and her remarks need to be set in the context of a Unitarian approach to professional education which stressed training for utility. Rather than seeking to draw women away from the home, indeed, it is clear that Unitarian writers envisaged the home, founded on the rational relationship between husband and wife, as the primary bulwark of reason, virtue and progress for society as a whole. Again, this project is made clear if we

⁸⁸ Michele Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: national identity and language in the eighteenth century* (London, 1996); *idem*, 'Manliness, effeminacy and the French: gender and the construction of national character in eighteenth-century England,' in Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities: 1660-1800* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 44-61.

⁸⁹ Occasionally, some writers did address the possibility that women might need to work outside the home. Treating on education among the 'middle ranks,' Priestley observed that women whose parents were obliged to live genteelly but possessed no fortune, such as the daughters of clergymen, were in a particularly unenviable position. Their parents should take care to educate them in 'such things as women can maintain themselves by doing.' This meant giving them a virtuous, proper and liberal education, by which they would either become 'valuable wives to men of liberal minds and better fortunes,' or at least be 'particularly well-qualified to conduct the education of others.' Joseph Priestley, *Miscellaneous Observations Relating to Education; more especially as it respects the conduct of the mind* (1778), in Rutt (ed.), *Works*, xxv, pp. 62-3.

⁹⁰ Wright further observed that men were liberally educated whilst being trained as fathers and husbands, and instructed in trades and professions, without detriment to any branch of their education. *UM*, 4 (1800), p. 112.

⁹¹ Aikin, *Epistles on Women*, p. 79.

⁹² Lucy Aikin (ed.), *A Legacy for Young Ladies, consisting of Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse, by A. L. Barbauld* (London, 1826), pp. 42-3.

turn to look at another facet of the ideal of masculinity which was represented in the memoirs of Unitarian ministers. One way in which the admirable character and conduct of these men was demonstrated was by highlighting their attachment to the domestic sphere, the propriety with which they carried out their domestic duties, and the superior ties of domestic affection which prevailed within their families. Timothy Kenrick's biographer, for example, crowned his pen portrait by reflecting 'It will justly be concluded that such a man appeared with great advantage in the scenes and offices of domestic life. Regularity and order, piety, affection and harmony, reigned in his family.'⁹³ Similarly, Charles Wellbeloved contemplated the exemplary domestic situation over which William Wood had presided:

His family was numerous enough to make the domestic hearth cheerful ...; he had the satisfaction to see [his children] grow up around him amiable and respectable, with the fairest prospects of success, of usefulness, and of comfort. In his own temper there was nothing to ruffle the peaceful current of domestic pleasure, and the harmony and affection of his family was in constant union with his own placidity.⁹⁴

Charting appropriate conduct in domestic life was integral to the depiction of the masculine ideal.

Of course, in locating the pursuit of virtue in the domestic sphere and the domestic affections and in highlighting the important role which women had to play in these realms Unitarians were not doing anything unique. In a sense, their perspective can be regarded as typical of the bourgeois outlook described by Gary Kelly in his work on the 'cultural revolution' carried out by and for the professional middle class in the late eighteenth century. Kelly argues that the discourses of subjectivity and domesticity were central to the middle-class quest for cultural hegemony. The morally and intellectually disciplined self, represented by 'reason' and 'virtue' found its authentic arena for operation and refinement in the interaction of an intimate circle of family and friends located within the home. The construction of 'domestic woman' as the embodiment of the superior values which the bourgeoisie ascribed to itself, in opposition to both the upper and lower classes, was a central element in this project.⁹⁵ The ideas articulated in the various discourses which elaborated on these themes of affective domesticity and the role of women in the cultivation of the domestic

⁹³Kentish, *Memoir of Timothy Kenrick*, p. xxxii.

⁹⁴Wellbeloved, *Memoirs of Wood*, p. 105.

⁹⁵Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford, 1993), especially pp. 5-29; *idem.*, *Revolutionary Feminism: the mind and career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Basingstoke, 1992), pp. 1-22.

sphere were often very alike, crossing the boundaries of theological and political difference. In the writings of Anglican evangelical theorists like William Wilberforce, Hannah More and Thomas Gisborne the cultivation of an affective and pious domestic sphere was placed at the heart of their conservative programme for moral reform and religious revival.⁹⁶ Passages from Hannah More's work which argued the need for the reformation of middle- and upper-class women's education from a perspective rooted in evangelical theology and political conservatism, can sound strikingly similar to those found in Unitarian writings. For example, she too invoked the 'man of sense' (although for evangelicals this meant something slightly different from the Unitarian model⁹⁷) in relation to whom she constructed a rational and intelligent wifely ideal:

it is a companion whom he wants It is not merely a creature who can paint, and play and dress, and dance; it is a being who can comfort and counsel him; one who can reason, and reflect, and feel, and act, and judge, and discourse, and discriminate; one who can assist him in his affairs and lighten his cares, soothe his sorrows, lighten his joys, strengthen his principles and educate his children.⁹⁸

Scottish Enlightenment writers on morality also began to substitute the idea of private sensibility for the classical concept of public spirit in arguing that the pursuit of virtue was best carried on in the protected sphere of the home. Not unlike Unitarians, they emphasised that the relationship between husband and wife could itself act as a stimulus to mutual moral improvement.⁹⁹ As a result, they argued in favour of female education which was both mentally and morally rigorous, and it is apparent that they too regarded this stance as evidence of their own enlightened perspective.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, despite these common themes, it is possible to identify a distinctive theme within Unitarian gender discourse which set it apart from those of commentators and

⁹⁶Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, especially pp. 107-179.

⁹⁷The principle difference was that evangelicals stressed the cultivation of 'heart' religion. When Thomas Gisborne urged men to 'study the scriptures with the reverence and unremitting attention due to the rule of his life,' he was not advocating the kind of critical analysis which Unitarians encouraged. See Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Ranks of Society in Great Britain, Resulting from their Respective Stations, Professions and Employments* (2 vols., London, 1795), i, p. 468.

⁹⁸More, *Strictures on Female Education*, i, p. 107.

⁹⁹John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: sensibility and community in late eighteenth-century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1987), ch. 4; Jane Rendall, 'Virtue and commerce: women in the making of Adam Smith's political economy,' in Ellen Kennedy and Susan Mendes (eds.), *Women in Western Political Philosophy: Kant to Nietzsche* (Brighton, 1987), pp. 44-77.

¹⁰⁰Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*, pp. 122-3.

theorists from other middle-class Christian groups: it stressed the absolute potential for parity in reason and virtue between women and men. Gary Kelly notes that within the dominant middle-class discourses of the late eighteenth century both virtue and reason were heavily gendered concepts. Women were regarded in a problematic relationship with reason, often being associated with 'unreason,' whilst female and male virtue were invested with sexually distinct meanings.¹⁰¹ Consistent with this trend, evangelical Anglican and Scottish Enlightenment discourses confirmed women's lesser mental capabilities whilst at the same time exalting their superior capacity for morality and piety. Gisborne, for example, argued that women's weaker physical constitution plainly showed the inferior capacity of their minds for 'close and comprehensive reasoning.' Their subordination was mitigated, however, by their greater natural susceptibility to religious impressions and their ability to mould men into more virtuous beings in accordance with the dictates of religion through the imperceptible, benign and pious medium of 'female influence.'¹⁰² And Hannah More's programme for female-driven moral regeneration can appear internally compromised by her continual reiteration of women's divinely-ordained subordination and their duty of submissiveness, passivity and obedience.¹⁰³ Expressions like these which suggest inherent mental and moral differences between the sexes are, as should be clear from the examples given above, conspicuously absent from Unitarian writings. Whereas evangelical writers dwelt on the need to protect sexual difference, Unitarians stressed the common humanity of women and men. Their distinctive stance was rooted in their determinedly egalitarian rationalism, as a corollary of which they remained aloof from the notion of morality grounded in sensibility which informed the other approaches. Although 'sensibility' had its origins in the same materialist basis of consciousness systematised by Newton and Locke as rationalism, and had many manifestations, basically it evolved to denote an emphasis on inner feelings rather than on reason as the stimulus to virtue.¹⁰⁴ It became a highly gendered concept, in which women were deemed to have an

¹⁰¹Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁰²Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (5th ed., 1801) pp. 19-23, pp. 263-4. On the Scottish Enlightenment perspective see Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*, ch. 5. Richard Wright completely rejected the idea that physical and mental strength were linked, citing examples of men of small stature but great genius to support his argument. *UM*, 3 (1799), p. 114.

¹⁰³More, *Strictures on Female Education*, see e.g. i, pp. 152-3.

¹⁰⁴G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: sex and society in eighteenth-century Britain* (London, 1992); Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 462-518.

inherently superior capacity for sensibility.¹⁰⁵ This perspective could be used to accord women a place of some importance, in theory at least, in the moral reformation of men and of society.¹⁰⁶ However, it also assumed inferior female rationality. Both More and Gisborne expressed the belief that the natural constitution of women's hearts and minds gave them a greater capacity for feeling and hence rendered them more receptive than men to deep religious impressions, but, as More warned, 'this very softness and ductility lay them more open to the seductions of temptation and error.'¹⁰⁷

Unitarians envisaged a rational domestic sphere presided over by partners equal in both reason and virtue. The distance which they sought to maintain from the cult of sensibility, their emphasis on reason rather than feeling as the basis for morality, and the positive and progressive view which they had of human potential, identifies them closely with those writers of the 1790s whose perspective Marilyn Butler terms 'Jacobin.' These Radical writers used the medium of print to voice their support for the French Revolution, and it was against them, of course, that evangelical Anglican discourses were principally directed.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, 'Jacobin' writers like Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin occupied what might be thought of as a radical penumbra around the Unitarian movement. They made friendships and contacts within the rational Dissenting network and its progressive, reforming theology and ideology informed their views.¹⁰⁹

The most important work on the position of women produced by this circle, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) shows clear parallels with the distinctive features of Unitarian gender ideology. The rights for which Wollstonecraft argued were that, as human beings designed by God for improvement and ultimately for perfection,

¹⁰⁵Barker-Benfield, *Cult of Sensibility*; Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*; Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*; Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-century England*.

¹⁰⁶Barker-Benfield, *Cult of Sensibility*, ch. 2; Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse*, ch. 5; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 114-8..

¹⁰⁷More, *Strictures on Female Education*, pp. 32-3. See also Gisborne, *Duties of the Female Sex*, p. 33, where he suggests that women's greater sensibility may even 'have a tendency to lead to unsteadiness of mind.'

¹⁰⁸Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford, 1975) especially pp. 29-44.

¹⁰⁹Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1974, reprinted London, 1992) especially chapters 4 and 6; Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* chapter 1; Virginia Sapiro, 'A woman's struggle for a language of enlightenment and virtue: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment 'feminism', in Tjitske Akkerman and Siep Stuurman (eds.), *Perspectives on Feminist Political Thought in European History: from the Middle Ages to the present* (London, 1998), pp. 122-135. Wollstonecraft's shared perspective with contemporary rational Dissent is also revealed in the way in which she drew on the historical methodology of the Scottish Enlightenment in her writings. See Jane Rendall, "'The grand causes which combine to carry mankind forward": Wollstonecraft, history and revolution,' *Women's Writing*, 4 (1997), pp. 155-172.

women must be allowed to attain independent virtue, and as true virtue could be acquired only through knowledge, this demanded that women have freedom to cultivate their individual reason. She contended that in the capacity for reason and virtue there was no inherent difference or distinction between the sexes, and that the overall improvement of humankind depended upon revolutionising women's education so that their ability for mental and moral development was unshackled. She wrote, for example,

The two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other. This I believe to be an indisputable truth, extending to every virtue. Chastity, modesty, public spirit, and all the noble train of virtues, on which social virtue and happiness are built, should be understood and cultivated by all mankind, or they will be cultivated to little effect.¹¹⁰

Education should enable people to advance towards perfection, and this progress could be witnessed in daily life. Like Unitarian writers, Wollstonecraft envisaged women cultivating their reason, exercising knowledge and putting virtue into practice within the domestic sphere, as 'affectionate wives and rational mothers.'¹¹¹ And her vignette of the ideal domestic scene, with husband and wife, 'equally necessary and independent of each other, because each fulfilled the respective duties of their station,' having, 'a taste for literature, to throw a little variety and interest into social converse, and some superfluous money to give to the needy and to buy books,' seems to capture the vision of gender relations and family life which Unitarians sought to realise, and which they reconstructed in the memoirs of their exemplary leaders.

There is scattered evidence to suggest that *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was well-received in Unitarian circles, where Wollstonecraft had numerous friends. Describing a social gathering at which Wollstonecraft was also present John Aikin reflected: 'Mrs W. has just published her "Rights of Woman", a curious work, inculcating quite the masculine character in the sex, but full of good observations.'¹¹² Aikin's son Charles apparently shared this favourable opinion. In 1797 he wrote to his aunt and erstwhile foster mother, Anna Barbauld, that one of Wollstonecraft's sisters was governess with the Wedgwood family at Etruria, observing, 'she has much of her sister's good sense, but is more reserved.'¹¹³ The moral backlash against Wollstonecraft and her opinions, which occurred in the wake of Godwin's publication in 1798 of a memoir of his late wife which frankly disclosed her

¹¹⁰Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792, reprinted New York, 1996), p. 143.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹²[A. L. le Breton,] *Memoirs of Seventy Years, by one of a Literary Family* (London, 1883), p. 21.

¹¹³Quoted in Betsy Rogers, *Georgian Chronicle: Mrs Barbauld and her Family* (London, 1958), p. 219.

unconventional sexual history, did make some Unitarians reluctant to condone her opinions.¹¹⁴ However, the credibility of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*'s survived in some quarters, so that in the nineteenth century, it formed part of a library of approved conduct reading which might be recommended to intelligent young women from Unitarian families, but which also included evangelical works. In 1812 William Turner, the minister at Newcastle, wrote to his daughter Mary who had recently married John Gooch Robberds of Manchester, advising her on the specific duties of a dissenting minister's wife. He saw this advice building upon the basic understanding which she already had of wifely duties:

On the qualities which a man of sense will most regard in the choice of a wife, you have read the judicious remarks of Dr Aikin; on the general duties of a wife you have availed yourself of the advice of Mr Gisbourne [*sic*]; and you have perused the strong and often coarse, though too often well-founded, strictures of Mrs Wollstonecraft.¹¹⁵

This letter was still considered relevant enough to be published in the *Monthly Repository* five years later, suggesting a continued endorsement of these works.¹¹⁶

Indeed, the three texts cited by Turner point to the ways in which Unitarian thinking on the nature, status and roles of women and on relations between the sexes developed during the 1810s and 1820s. It is important not to overstate the extent to which it is possible to discern a change in attitudes, especially as Unitarian writings which deal explicitly with the position of women during this period are decidedly thin on the ground. Rather, what those writings which do exist suggest is that there was a subtle shift in emphasis. The distinctive, progressive and egalitarian vision which distinguished Unitarian gender ideology of the period between 1770 and 1810, seen in the work of the Unitarian intelligentsia and built upon by Wollstonecraft, continued to inform thinking but assumed a less prominent place in discussions about women's education. At the same time, arguments which had been articulated by evangelical Anglican writers, which stressed sexual difference and women's special moral role, began to appear in Unitarian publications.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, ch. 19. In a letter which Lucy Aikin wrote to one of her correspondents, a Mrs Taylor, in 1803 for example, she disapproved the feminist arguments used by Wollstonecraft and her friend and sympathizer Mary Hays, claiming that their enthusiasm would serve only to retard women's advancement. Le Breton, *Memoirs of Lucy Aikin*, pp. 125-6. Family tradition also records Aikin snubbing Mary Shelley on account of the fact that her birth and parentage. Le Breton, *Memoirs of Seventy Years*, p. 81. Claire Tomalin suggests, though, that Aikin's aunt, Anna Barbauld, was one of those who defended Wollstonecraft's reputation – although she did not wholly concur with her feminist stance. *The Life and Death of Wollstonecraft*, p. 292 note

¹¹⁵William Turner to Mary Robberds (29/1/1812) in Turner MSS, N.L.P.S

¹¹⁶*MR*, 11 (1817), pp. 597-600.

The ways in which this combining of perspectives shaped Unitarian ideas on the position of women are well-illustrated in the pages of the *Monthly Repository*, the denomination's main periodical between its foundation by Robert Aspland in 1806 and its purchase by William Johnson Fox in 1831. For example, in 1822-3 Harriet Martineau made her first foray into print in a series of three articles (of which in later life, when she had rejected the Unitarianism of her upbringing, she declared that she was 'heartily ashamed'¹¹⁷). The first two looked at 'Female Writers on Practical Divinity,' and formed a comparative study of the works of Hannah More and Anna Barbauld and the third was an essay 'On Female Education'. In the first article, More received substantial praise from Martineau, who argued that difference in doctrine should not obscure the value of the rules for conduct in life towards God, others and self which it inculcated.¹¹⁸ As would be expected from a good Unitarian, though, in her second piece Martineau acknowledged Barbauld as the more accessible and edifying author: 'she meets our ideas and seems to express what had passed through our own minds, much more forcibly than we ourselves could have done.'¹¹⁹ However, Martineau does advance a novel proposition which indicates the influence of evangelical conceptions of femininity. In the first article she suggested that the reason why women had appeared as eminent writers on practical devotion was, 'owing to the peculiar susceptibility of the female mind, and its consequent warmth of feeling.'¹²⁰ In traditional Unitarian thinking it was reason, not feeling, which gave rise to accurate religious impressions. There was no suggestion that women were regarded as inherently either more emotional or more religious than men.

In her article on female education, Martineau presented what was effectively a diluted version of the arguments of her eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Unitarian predecessors on the question. She disclaimed any intention of enquiring whether women's minds were as powerful as men's, but observed that when women were given the same opportunity for learning, their minds seemed capable of being 'brought into comparison'. She outlined too the steady improvement which had taken place in the condition of women since the introduction of Christianity had sanctioned their right to the personal acquisition of knowledge, intimating that, as women's access to useful learning increased, so their moral character would advance. Such acknowledgements demanded that 'as much care should be

¹¹⁷Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (2 vols., London, 1877), pp. 118-120.

¹¹⁸*MR*, 17 (1822), pp. 593-5.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 746-50.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 593.

taken over the formation of their minds,' as was over the formation of men's. In outlining the duties of women, she highlighted their role as sensible companions, especially to their husbands, and as rational educators of their children, although interestingly she also indicated the equal importance of a liberal education in case women remained spinsters, for whom a life of the mind would be absolutely essential in order to 'preserve them from the faults so generally attributed to that state.' Analysing the relationship between women and men, Martineau clearly followed earlier Unitarian writers when she wrote that, although a woman's proper sphere was the home, 'there, she is to provide, not only for the bodily comfort of the man, but ... she is to enter into a community of mind with him.' However, it is also possible to detect a subtle shift in emphasis, as the following passage indicates:

As she finds nobler objects presented to her grasp, and that her rank in the scale of being is elevated, she will engraft the vigorous qualities of the mind of man on her own blooming virtues, and insinuate into his mind those softer graces and milder beauties, which will smooth the ruggedness of his character.¹²¹

The communion of mind between the sexes would be mutually improving, but it was not now to be achieved through the shared cultivation of common human attributes, but by the transfer from each partner to the other of some of the distinctive gendered qualities which they brought to the relationship.

There is, though, evidence that among some writers a more decided engrafting of evangelical ideas about femininity onto the established Unitarian model was taking place. In 1815, for example, a review was published of the Unitarian John Morrell's *Reasons for the Classical Education of Children of both Sexes*. The anonymous reviewer dwelt overwhelmingly on the implications of Morrell's work for women, and consistent with the denomination's established belief that a broad and thorough education was regarded as an absolute requirement, the work was approved as calculated to encourage the development of women's mental powers. However, the concluding remarks are highly revealing. In some respects, the sentiments echo those found in earlier Unitarian works. Improved rational education would enable 'cultivated, reasoning women' to rise to 'the rank for which nature designed them, and to which they will be hailed by the generous and enlightened of our sex.' But a different tone is also present. The reviewer perceived that one result of allowing women access to classical literature would be to cleanse it of its more immoral passages, so that in time an improvement would be effected 'by female influence in the libraries of our schools

¹²¹MR, 18 (1823), pp. 77-81.

and colleges,' for 'Where woman is once admitted, purity and decorum must follow, or the bands of society will burst asunder.' Meanwhile, in her role as a rational wife and mother, a woman would be, 'the animating soul that urges [her husband] on the path to virtue and patriotism, that gives ardour to his piety and tenderness to his benevolence.' She would live 'more for others' benefit than for her own.' And most importantly,

she will feel her influence in society whilst training useful future members of it, and whilst she puts wisdom into the hearts and minds of her offspring and dependants, she will think not of being the rival of man in power and worldly influence; her glory is to be the guide to heirs of immortality.¹²²

Whereas Unitarians conventionally pointed to the mutually improving relationship which was possible between women and men, and highlighted the ways in which human capabilities and virtues cut across gender boundaries, the reviewer here stressed the superior moral force which 'female influence' could exert, on institutions, on men and on children. Explicitly, s/he did not employ the language of either mental or moral equality between the sexes. And the weight of argument about female virtue was tipped away from discussing the pressing need for women to increase in reason and knowledge, and towards its practical manifestation in women's self-effacement and their role in promoting the moral cultivation of others. A distinctively Unitarian stance on the meaning of gender was no longer so apparent.

Emphasising the importance of correctly directing women's moral influence and their need for selflessness in this way is redolent of the sentiments put forward by evangelical writers of the late eighteenth century. It is also the essence of the position into which evangelical Anglican arguments had resolved themselves by the 1830s, the classic model of domestic Victorian womanhood, set out in works such as Sarah Lewis's *Women's Mission* (1839). Lewis argued the need for women to have an education which developed not only the intellect, but also 'the conscience, the heart and the affections,'¹²³ in order that they could raise their own children for a life of virtuous conduct. The 'mission' which she claimed for women was, 'that of the instruments (under God) for the regeneration of the world,' and this they would do through the moral influence which they exerted on their families, and especially on their growing sons.¹²⁴

Despite the apparent decline in willingness on the part of Unitarian writers during the

¹²²*MR*, 10 (1815), pp. 242-3.

¹²³[Sarah Lewis,] *Women's Mission*, fourth ed. (London, 1839), p.65.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

1810s and 1820s to incorporate the more radical and egalitarian aspects of their predecessors' gender ideology into their works, though, it is clear that throughout the period between 1770 and 1830 Unitarians saw themselves at the forefront of the drive to improve the position of women, primarily through the promotion of female education. The allusion by the reviewers of Morrell's book to 'generous and enlightened' men's approval of women's intellectual development indicates that adopting this stance continued to be a measure of masculinity too. Education was, as I noted above, the means by which Unitarian men sought to attain a position of leadership within the middle class, and clearly consigning Unitarian women to perpetual ignorance would have been utterly at odds with the progressive and unprejudiced self-image which they sought to cultivate and portray. Advocating the pursuit of mental development among both women and men contributed to the presentation of a superior aspect by the denomination as a whole. This was clearly something in which they took some pride, as letter from Lucy Aikin to the American minister, William Ellery Channing, in 1841 indicates. Aikin lamented the decline of Dissent, but qualified her remark, writing that she had been referring chiefly to Presbyterianism: 'that is, of the only sect which could boast of learned ministers, and which once included in its bosom a very considerable body of worthy, and well-educated, and enlightened families.'¹²⁵ The Unitarian movement's theologians provided the religious underpinnings for this educational impulse: not only was the progress of humanity inextricably linked to its level of rational cultivation, but also true progress was only possible when women and men were able to advance in harmony.

¹²⁵ P. H. le Breton, *Memoirs, Miscellanies and Letters of the Late Lucy Aikin* (London, 1864) p. 425.

Part Two
Quaker and Unitarian Women in Yorkshire

Introduction to Part Two

Tracing the origins and development of the gender ideologies espoused by members of the Quaker and Unitarian elites during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries illustrates how each denomination's religious beliefs underpinned distinctive ideas about the nature, status and roles of women. For the following three chapters, the principal focus of discussion shifts away from theory to explore the practical meanings for Quaker and Unitarian women of their religious affiliation through a regional case study based on Yorkshire. The dominant gender ideologies of the two denominations influenced the activities and experiences of female adherents by providing guidelines on appropriate behaviour, roles and responsibilities. Within these ideological frameworks, however, groups and individuals found scope for self-expression and autonomous action. Theory was legitimately available for creative appropriation, interpretation and negotiation in practice. For both Quaker and Unitarian women, the ways in which they engaged with denominational beliefs and practices were intensely personal, shaped not only by their religious identity but also by factors such as family and social and economic background and marital status.

Yorkshire was an important centre for both the Society of Friends and Unitarianism between 1770 and 1830. Male and female Friends from the area were prominent figures in the wider life of the Society. For example, they served on Yearly Meeting committees and forged links with Quakers elsewhere whilst travelling in the ministry. The county was also home to several pioneering institutions for the provision of education and mental healthcare which were established at the end of the eighteenth century and attracted the interest and support of the national Quaker community. Meanwhile, in Unitarianism, Yorkshire in the 1770s was the location of some of the most significant intellectual relationships forged between Rational Dissenting ministers and liberal Churchmen which stimulated the emergence of the denomination. Over the next sixty years, Unitarianism took root in Yorkshire's old Presbyterian chapels. When Manchester College moved to York in 1803 the city became a focal point for the denomination both regionally and nationally. In addition, disproportionately high numbers of Friends and Unitarians were prominent activists in the cross-denominational ventures for social, economic and political relief and reform which became an increasingly common feature of Yorkshire's urban landscape during the period.

By no means, though, could it be argued that either Quakerism or Unitarianism flourished in the county. Mirroring the national picture, the general trend in both

denominations indicated narrowing appeal. In 1770 Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, the regional organisational division of the Society of Friends, consisted of the same fourteen Monthly Meetings from which it had been constituted in 1669 under the direct guidance of George Fox. It covered a geographical area roughly coextensive with the county's Ridings and the City of York, with some slight anomalies on its western fringes.¹ Over the next sixty years, however, the relentless drop in membership of Quarterly Meeting prompted a series of organisational changes, and by amalgamations and transfers the number of Monthly Meetings was reduced to nine.² A similar pattern of decline is apparent in Unitarianism. Between 1740 and 1820 thirty-four Unitarian chapels evolved in Yorkshire, but by the end of the period only twenty remained.³

Studying an area as large and diverse as Yorkshire offers the possibility of exploring the lives of Quaker and Unitarian women in a wide variety of circumstances. Great variations in the levels of urbanisation and industrialization existed across late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Yorkshire. The degree of development which characterised each locality was reflected in the membership of its Quaker and Unitarian communities, helping to shape female experience in different ways and giving texture to the character of the denominations in the county as a whole.

For the purposes of this regional study, the areas of particular interest are the city of York and the West Riding. York's importance rested on its historic functions as a marketing, administrative and cultural centre for the surrounding county, but by the nineteenth century its importance was being eclipsed by the booming woollen-producing towns of the West Riding. No intensive manufacturing industry was developed in the city, illustrating how, in the words of one local historian, 'the direct effects of the industrial revolution had passed it by.'⁴ Steadily rising poor rates during the early nineteenth century helped to reinforce the impression among contemporaries that York's fortunes were changing for the worse. However, there is some evidence to suggest that York was not in complete decline. In traditional small-scale manufacturing several new trades were introduced into the city, and

¹Sedbergh Monthly Meeting in the western Dales was part of Westmorland Quarterly Meeting and Settle Monthly Meeting included the Preparative Meeting of Wray in Lancashire.

²W. Pearson Thistlethwaite, *Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of the Society of Friends, 1665-1966* (Harrogate, 1967), pp. 3-5.

³Frank Walker and John F. Goodchild, *Unitarianism in Yorkshire: a short history* (unpublished, printed Wakefield, 1962), p. 17.

⁴Alan Armstrong, *Stability and Change in an English County Town: a social study of York, 1801-51* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 19.

there was evidence of willingness to embrace new technology. Meanwhile, alongside its legally established administrative role it retained regional significance as a hub of communications and of trading and social activities.⁵

In contrast to the negligible impact which industrialization made on York, its full force was felt in the West Riding of Yorkshire. During the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the manufacture and marketing of cloth and yarns, especially woollens, became increasingly concentrated on the towns of Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield, Wakefield and, most importantly, Leeds.⁶ After 1750, the expansion of the woollen and worsted industries in the West Riding rapidly outpaced that in all other national centres of production, although the period up until 1830 must be understood as one of industrial transition.⁷ Fully integrated factory systems did arrive in Leeds before that date, but the growth experienced in the West Riding textile industry was overwhelmingly due to the intensification of more traditional, small-scale production carried on in houses and craft shops.⁸ The textile boom attracted both new industries and new inhabitants to the area; the population of Leeds alone swelled from an estimated 30,609 in 1775 to 123,393 in 1831.⁹ Focussing on individual towns in the region, historians have argued that their flourishing economic fortunes stimulated the emergence of a distinctive urban middle class which sought to secure local hegemony through a variety of cultural initiatives designed to promote its values and aspirations.¹⁰

These urban environments, both ancient and newly-emergent, were home to Yorkshire's most important Friends' Monthly Meetings and Unitarian congregations. Unitarianism was almost exclusively an urban phenomenon. Elsewhere in the county it was represented by, for example, Upper Chapel in the national cutlery and hardware capital, Sheffield, and Bowl Alley

⁵*Ibid.* From 1770 onwards comb- and horn-making, confectionery, wholesale drug trading, toy manufacturing and glass making were introduced into York, and a steam-powered flour mill was opened. See P. Tillot (ed.), *The Victoria County History of Yorkshire: the City of York* (London, 1961), pp. 212-225, 259-60 and 156-8.

⁶R. G. Wilson, *Gentleman Merchants: the merchant community in Leeds, 1700-1830* (Manchester, 1971), pp. 54-60.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 6; John Smail, *Merchants and Manufacturers: the English wool textile industry in the eighteenth century* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 113-132.

⁸R. G. Wilson, 'Georgian Leeds,' and E. J. Connell and M. Ward, 'Industrial development, 1780-1914,' both in Derek Fraser (ed.), *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester, 1980).

⁹R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: the making the British middle class, Leeds, 1820-1850* (Manchester, 1990), p. 23.

¹⁰*Ibid.*; Theodore Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990); John Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture: Halifax, Yorkshire, 1660-1780* (Ithica and London, 1994).

Lane in the prominent port of Hull. Such rural chapels as did exist tended to be either essentially satellites of their urban neighbours, like that at Elland, near Halifax, or in the private ownership of substantial Unitarian businessmen, as was the case with the chapel at Norton Hall, the country estate of the Sheffield banking dynasty of Shore. The Society of Friends, on the other hand, had Meetings established throughout the county, thus finding expression in both rural and urban areas. In Monthly Meetings like those of Pickering and Settle, for example, the Quaker community was distributed through scattered agricultural settlements, villages and country market towns.

Exploring the lives of Quaker and Unitarian women in a comparative way has been complicated by the significant imbalance between the two denominations in terms of sources available for regional and local study. A vast amount of material exists relating women Friends in Yorkshire. Registers, volumes of minutes, and related papers record the business transacted not only by the various bodies which met at Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting but also by those which met monthly in each district and fortnightly in Preparative Meetings at every Meeting House in the county, and of course at each of these levels there were disciplinary Meetings of women. The denominationally-approved practice of literary self-examination generated detailed personal writings both by and about Yorkshire Quaker women, and, along with the close kin and community ties of the Society, also stimulated the exchange of voluminous correspondence between family and friends. These Quaker writings have particular richness because many were composed by women themselves. Indisputably they illuminate more fully the lives of women who held positions of official responsibility, especially ministers, but they do offer some insight into those of 'ordinary' women Friends. In contrast, Unitarianism did not have an established and enforced system for recording its official day-to-day business, so that the quality and quantity of surviving chapel records depends entirely on the administrative inclination of the incumbent minister and chapel trustees. Neither did its organisational structure offer women an official role, thereby reserving positions of denominational authority and eminence almost exclusively for men. Lacking the practices which have been instrumental in yielding the profusion of insights into women Friends' experiences, the traces left behind of Unitarian women are often slight and shadowy. There are a small number of exceptions to this rule, notably Catharine Cappe of York, but in all cases those Unitarian women whose activities have come to light belonged to the elite of their community. At the same time, of course, it should not be overlooked that the 'silence' of certain groups of women within both Quakerism and Unitarianism can itself be suggestive.

As a result of the disparity between the two denominations in terms of regional sources, slightly different approaches have been adopted in each of the chapters in this section. Chapters three and four look at the positions of Quaker and Unitarian women respectively within their religious communities. The scattered, often sparse, nature of sources relating to Unitarian women dictated that material from across the county must be used, although some statistical analysis has been carried out using three sample congregations from the chapels of St Saviourgate, York; Mill Hill, Leeds, and Northgate End, Halifax. In an attempt to obtain a balance in view of the abundance of material available chronicling the lives of women Friends, four sample areas were selected for detailed investigation which reflect the diverse character of Yorkshire experience during the period under discussion. The localities covered by York, Brighouse, Pickering and Settle Monthly Meetings were chosen. Chapter five explores comparatively the patterns of and motivations behind Quaker and Unitarian women's involvement in activities outside their denominational communities in the city of York. These pursuits were primarily channelled through philanthropic ventures, and drew them into relationships with those of other faiths. The decision to focus here on York reflects the richness of sources relating not only to cross-denominational organisations in the city, but also to some local Quaker and Unitarian women. This combination of data has made it possible to investigate closely the relationships between individuals' religious backgrounds and their participation in ventures without a specifically denominational agenda.

Chapter Three

‘Mothers, teachers and nurses of others:’ women in the Yorkshire Quaker community.

Introduction

The way in which the Society of Friends conceptualized the position of women and relations between the sexes was quite distinctive, as I showed in chapter one. For the faithful within the true church of God, some mingling of the qualities conventionally associated with ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ was deemed both possible and desirable. This fluidity extended into spatial categories, giving sanction to the exercise of denominational responsibilities both inside and outside the home by women Friends as well as men. Yet whilst the Society was a tightly-knit organisation in which adherence to rigid and uniform patterns of behaviour was a condition of membership, the meaning of Quakerism for all its female adherents was by no means unvarying. This chapter will explore the practical implications of Friends’ gender ideology for women by focussing in detail on the status, roles and responsibilities of women belonging to the Yorkshire Quaker community.

The factor which most distinguished the religious lives of some women Friends from others was the special position accorded to those who were acknowledged ministers. Within this spiritual elite, the experiences of women who travelled in the ministry and those whose ministerial work was confined to their local circle displayed further differences. In the lives of ministering women, and particularly those who were itinerant, the extent to which Quaker attitudes regarding gender opened up possibilities for female leadership, independent agency, and an acknowledged role for women in shaping the development of their church, is revealed. The activities of Yorkshire’s female ministers were supported by and in turn reinforced an intimate network of leading women Friends which, whilst most evident at a county level, extended across England and the Atlantic. Of course, the overwhelming majority of Quaker women were not ministers, and by the very nature of sectarian literature and record-keeping far less can be uncovered about their lives. In the Meetings for discipline, however, a sphere was open to them where they could take an active part alongside ministering Friends in the running of the Society, and the sources offer glimpses both of the ways in which Quaker membership effected their daily lives and of their importance in the functioning of the Quaker community. The Society’s organisational structure indicated a strong appreciation of the

significance of sexual difference, and drew women as a group into close fellowship. It is evident that, through their activities and example, leading women Friends encouraged others to undertake ministering and disciplinary duties. Yorkshire was also the scene of a more direct endeavour to stimulate women to faithfulness and service in the Society, with the establishment of a Friends' girls' school in York. The aims, values and practices of the school illuminate Friends' attitudes towards both education and the status and roles of women.

The structure and composition of the Yorkshire Quaker community

Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of Friends can quite accurately be described as a community. Corporate identity and group consciousness were central to the Society, and its pyramid structure of local, district, regional and national Meetings sought to provide a solid framework through which to maintain the cohesiveness of the organisation. At each level the Meetings provided a focus for individual members, bringing them together in what was envisaged as the strengthening experience of shared faith and practice. The most basic collective components of the Society's organisation were the Preparative Meetings centred on individual Meeting Houses. These met twice weekly for worship and once each fortnight in sexually segregated sittings to enquire into the state of the discipline among their members and to record any intentions of marriage and requests for membership. From these Meetings, delegates were sent to district Monthly Meeting for discipline. The responsibilities of Monthly Meetings were wide-ranging. For example, they conducted official enquiries into the affairs of those intending to marry, dealt with straightforward cases of disciplinary transgression and membership requests, and granted the certificates which liberated ministers to travel in Britain. Representatives appointed there attended the regional Quarterly Meetings where more complicated issues of discipline, often as they related to the Society's relationship with the wider world, were addressed, and where the concerns of ministers wishing to travel abroad were considered. Thence representatives were sent to the Yearly Meetings in London. Superior Meetings was expected to extend care, encouragement and admonition to their constituents, the well-being of the whole Society being dependent on that of its component parts. In the Queries posed by the Yearly, Quarterly and Monthly Meetings to those below them, Friends were asked to assess how far 'love and unity' were preserved in their local gatherings.¹

¹See Appendix 1 for a breakdown of the Preparative and Monthly Meetings within Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting.

Recognition of the deep sense of shared identity which the Society sought to foster among Friends should not obscure the extent to which practical diversities existed within Meetings. Not only were there sometimes considerable social and economic variations in status among the members of individual Monthly Meetings, but also the several Monthly Meetings from which Quarterly Meeting was composed could display quite distinct characteristics. Comparing the occupational backgrounds of members of York, Brighouse, Pickering and Settle Monthly Meetings illustrates these structural differences.

	Occupational categories					
	Professional	Merchant/ manufacturer	Retail/ other non- manual	Skilled manual	Agricultural	Unskilled
York	5 (4)	13 (9)	63 (46)	17 (12)	24 (18)	15 (11)
Brighouse	8 (4)	72 (36)	59 (29)	47 (23)	17 (8)	0 (0)
Pickering	0 (0)	14 (14)	34 (33)	16 (15)	34 (33)	5 (5)
Settle	5 (8)	15 (25)	13 (21)	9 (15)	17 (28)	2 (3)

Table 1. *Listed occupations of household heads and independent single people belonging to York Monthly Meeting, 1790-1835, and of Brighouse, Pickering and Settle Monthly Meetings, 1813-37. Figures in brackets show the percentage of members in each occupational category.² See Appendix 2 for a detailed breakdown of the occupations included in each category by Monthly Meeting.*

Table 1 shows that in all four Meetings, the majority of Friends belonged to families engaged in the middle-status range of occupations between merchants and manufacturers and skilled manual workers. Independent retailing especially was consistently important as an occupational choice for Friends. At the same time, however, the particular geographical

² Data compiled using 'York Monthly Meeting List of Members, 1790-1840,' Clifford Street MSS K4.1, BLUL; 'Brighouse Monthly Meeting List of Members, 1813-37,' Carlton Hill MSS M1, BLUL; 'Pickering Monthly Meeting List of Members, 1813-37,' DQR 8/33, HUL; 'Settle Monthly Meeting List of Members, 1813-37,' D2, Carlton Hill MSS, BLUL. Only members for whom a definite occupational status was listed have been included in Table 1. The clerks of Brighouse Meeting in particular became lax about recording the occupation of new members. In addition, Friends of both sexes worked as domestic servants and apprentices, often coming into service in one Meeting from another, but they are impossible to identify with accuracy in all cases from the membership lists and have therefore been omitted. Listing the numbers of Friends for whom no occupational data is available would have been misleading, as it is impossible to tell in the cases of many single people recorded whether they are children or adults.

characteristics of each locality were impressed upon its Quaker Meeting. The city of York was the hub of York Meeting, which also included the small rural Meetings of Selby and Cottingwith. York's importance as both a regional trading centre and the heart of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting is evident in the particularly large number of Friends engaged in the retail and other non-manual category of occupations. These were chiefly shopkeepers (indeed, all but two of the unskilled workers in York Meeting were shop assistants employed by Friends), but also included those who worked in the denominational service institutions based in the city: the Friends' Girls' School and the Retreat hospital. The agricultural families in York Meeting belonged almost entirely to Selby and Cottingwith Preparative Meetings. Brighouse, like York, was overwhelmingly an urban Meeting with only a narrow agricultural base, but its urban nature was very different. It included the four burgeoning West Riding textile towns of Leeds, Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield, and the important ways in which Friends both participated in this industrial growth and capitalised on the new opportunities offered by urban expansion are apparent in the substantial minority of merchants and manufacturers in the Meeting, including many engaged in aspects of the textile trade.³

In contrast to York and Brighouse, Pickering and Settle Meetings covered predominantly rural areas, and again each had individual features. Pickering had no small upper layer of professional Friends like that found in the other three Meetings, and the two most common categories of occupation, retail trading and farming, reflected the nature of the district. Its catchment area extended north-eastwards from the boundary of York Meeting across the North York Moors to the North Sea coast. It was chiefly an area of scattered agricultural settlements with several population clusters: namely, the two market towns of Pickering and Malton and the coastal ports of Whitby and Scarborough, each of which was home to a Preparative Meeting. Weaving was historically one of the staple domestic industries in the town of Pickering and its surrounding villages, but like York its significance in that department was being rapidly overshadowed by the West Riding.⁴ Whitby's economy rested on its maritime industries, which were at the height of their prosperity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, due in no small part to the whaling which took place from there between 1753 and 1837.⁵ At Scarborough, the functions of a port and harbour were

³On Friends' contribution to the industrial development of the West Riding see David H. Pratt, *English Quakers in the First Industrial Revolution: a study of the Quaker community in four industrial counties - Lancashire, York, Warwick and Gloucester, 1750-1830* (London, 1985).

⁴William Page (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of York: the North Riding, volume 2* (London, 1923), p. 432.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 511-2.

supplemented during the period as the town emerged as a fashionable watering-place.⁶ In both Whitby and Scarborough a small number of Friends were engaged in maritime occupations. Overall, however, the pattern of employment across Pickering Meeting suggests a lack of dynamism in the area and reliance on a narrow range of established sources of livelihood.

Settle Meeting, in the south-west Dales, covered the least densely-populated area of the four sample Meetings. The market town of Settle itself was the only substantial settlement in the Meeting. The building of the Keighley-Kendal turnpike via Skipton and Settle in the late eighteenth century encouraged Settle's emergence as a commercial and trading centre of importance in the Craven district, and the Meeting's relatively large professional upper strata was due primarily to the presence of the major merchant and banking family of Birkbeck whose members both encouraged and capitalized on this development.⁷ In the surrounding area, where other Preparative Meetings gathered in the villages of Lothersdale, Bentham and Newton in Bowland, farming was a major source of livelihood among Friends. Changes taking place in the textile industries of both the West Riding and Lancashire also meant that textile production had become increasingly important to the economy of both Settle town and its satellite communities.⁸ It is a reflection of this that all but a handful of the merchants, manufacturers and skilled craftsmen in Settle Monthly Meeting were engaged in some aspect of the textile industry.

The differences between the Meetings which formed the Yorkshire Quaker community are highlighted in the shifting fortunes of the four sample Meetings in terms of membership. Only in 1813 did Quarterly Meeting decree that Monthly Meetings must compile and maintain membership registers, so before that date it is impossible to determine accurately the number of Friends in each Meeting. Figures are, therefore, only available for a small part of the period covered by this study, but the changes in membership apparent between 1813 and the termination of the registers in 1837, set out in Table 2 below, are suggestive.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 540.

⁷Thomas Brayshaw and Ralph M. Robinson, *A History of the Ancient Parish of Giggleswick: which included the townships of Giggleswick, Settle, Rathmell, Langcliffe and Stainforth* (London, 1932), pp. 160, 175, 195-6.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

	Number of members	
	1813	1837
York	148*	398
Brighouse	610	824
Pickering	266	135
Settle	153	90

Table 2. *Number of members recorded in York, Brighouse, Pickering and Settle Monthly Meetings, 1813 and 1837; *York figure for 1810.*

The shortcomings of these figures should be acknowledged: they include not only infants who might not have survived to adulthood, but also large numbers of transient members, Friends who moved between Meetings for short periods in order to visit family, to work, and so on. In addition, membership did not necessarily imply diligent devotion to the Society. When Tottenham's Thomas Shillitoe spent three months resident in Yorkshire on a religious visit in 1807 he recorded in minute detail the state of the Meetings which he visited. He lamented the smallness of many, but equally so the worldly spirit which seemed to pervade those which were more populous.⁹ Objections aside, however, it remains evident that there were substantial differences between the Meetings in terms of both size and growth rates. That Brighouse was largest is hardly surprising, given the high number of expanding towns in its borders, and in both years counted its membership was greater than that of the combined total for the three other Meetings. Similarly, the smallness of Settle can be partly explained by the overall sparsity of the area's population. The patterns of growth displayed by the Meetings suggest that in the early nineteenth century urban and rural Quaker communities were undergoing quite distinct changes in fortune.. York and Brighouse, the two predominantly urban Meetings, both grew in size. Sheila Wright argues that in York Meeting this growth can be attributed to the ability of the Meeting to attract and retain new members, and to its leniency in disciplinary matters.¹⁰ The city of York's position as a centre of Quaker institutions, and of relatively affluent Quaker families offering employment and apprenticeship opportunities to Friends from elsewhere, may also have played a part. Similar factors probably operated in Brighouse, where urban and industrial expansion created increasing opportunities for Friends

⁹[Thomas Shillitoe,] *Journal of the Life, Labours and Travels of Thomas Shillitoe* (2 vols., London, 1839), i, pp. 56-65.

¹⁰Sheila Wright, *Friends in York: the dynamics of Quaker revival, 1780-1860* (Keele, 1995), pp. 112-131.

for Friends to gain a living in the textile industry and service trades. Indeed, the importance of male employment openings for shaping the fortunes of a Quaker community cannot be underestimated: upon marriage, a woman became a Member of her husband's Meeting, so the ability of a Meeting to retain and attract young men determined how far it was able to benefit from internal demographic growth. In the chiefly rural Meetings of Pickering and Settle there were steep reductions in membership. Friends from these districts were attracted to expanding towns, in the case of Settle to those in the North West as well as in Yorkshire. Declining numbers became self-perpetuating, as the scattered nature of the Quaker communities in these areas made it difficult for them to generate the dynamic character which might have attracted new members and retained the Society's influence over the sentiments and conduct of existing Friends.

Women and the ministry

Women were a vital and influential presence in the Quaker ministry in Yorkshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An examination of the record of ministering Friends kept by Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting after 1786, supplemented with information for the preceding decades from other sources, reveals that in numerical terms between 1766 and 1835 they outnumbered men in all but two of the area's Monthly Meetings and that in some their pre-eminence was striking. For example, in Balby Meeting, which covered south Yorkshire, there were fifteen female and just two male ministers between 1786 and 1814, and both of the latter were married to ministers. Table 3 below conveys a sense of the broad shifts taking place in the sexual composition of the ministry within each Meeting during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some Meetings like York, Brighouse and Pickering apparently remained able to sustain an active female (and, for that matter, male) ministry across the period, whilst in Settle, Richmond and Thirsk, for example, it proved difficult or impossible for the ministry to flourish. The differing patterns of ministerial activity in the sample Meetings of York, Brighouse, Settle and Pickering suggest that to a large degree there was a circular relationship between the vitality of a Meeting's ministry and its ability to retain and attract members. In York, Brighouse and Settle the fortunes of the Meetings matched those of their ministry. Pickering seems rather anomalous, but it should be noted that it inherited two female ministers in 1833 as a result of the partition of Guisborough Meeting. Indeed, a major drawback of these figures is the way in which they disguise both the extent

to which individuals moved between Monthly Meetings, and the relatively short duration of some ministerial careers. However, when the movements of individual ministers are traced between 1766 and 1835, thus allowing for internal mobility, the leading presence of women remains apparent: there were ninety-six recorded female ministers and sixty seven male.¹¹

Monthly Meeting	1766-1800		1801-1835		Total 1766-1835	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
York	9	5	8 (2)	8 (2)	15	11
Balby	16	6	16 (9)	7 (2)	23	11
Pontefract	5	4	5 (1)	10 (2)	9	13
Brighouse	6	7	12 (2)	6 (1)	16	12
Knaresbrough	4	3	1 (1)	1 (0)	4	4
Settle	10	9	4 (3)	4 (2)	11	11
Richmond	5	4	2 (2)	2 (2)	5	4
Thirsk	1	3	0 (0)	1 (0)	1	4
Guisborough	1	1	4 (0)	3 (0)	5	4
Pickering	7	5	8 (1)	4 (1)	14	8
Owstwick and Cave	2	0	6 (1)	1 (0)	7	1
Total	66	48	66 (22)	47 (12)	110	83

Table 3. *Numbers of male and female ministers in the Monthly Meetings of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1766-1835. Figures in brackets show the number of ministers surviving after 1800 from the earlier period.*¹²

Contemporaries acknowledged the extent to which women had become established as the leaders in the Yorkshire ministry. For example, in 1825 the veteran Doncaster Elder, Richard Cockin, whose wife Ellen had by then been a minister for forty years, wrote to his niece Mary Fox of Plymouth that during the previous year five new ministers had been recorded in

¹¹See Appendix 3 for biographical details of key female ministers in York, Brighouse, Pickering and Settle.

¹²Data compiled using 'Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting Record of Ministers and Elders, 1785-1876,' Clifford Street MSS I 6, BLUL; 'Appendix 15: Ministers deceased,' in Thistlethwaite, *Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting*, pp. 426-7. See Appendix 1 for details of anomalous boundary and status changes to Richmond, Thirsk and Guisborough Monthly Meetings which have influenced the figures shown in Table 3.

Yorkshire: 'and what renders it more extraordinary,' he added, 'is that four of them were men.'¹³ Exploring the roles, responsibilities and relationships of ministering women Friends reveals that their ability to establish a vigorous and influential female ministry in certain parts of Yorkshire rested not only upon the theoretical justification for such work outlined in chapter one, but also upon the practical support and encouragement which they received from within the Quaker community.

Like their male counterparts, women who were acknowledged as ministers had the right to request permission from their Meeting to travel locally, nationally or internationally on divinely-appointed religious service, usually to visit other Friends. The levels of itinerant activity undertaken by Yorkshire's female ministers varied considerably. Not all sought travelling certificates, and some of those who made official journeys did so only within their locality. Deborah Backhouse, for example, made her sole ministerial journey when she and her fellow York minister, Ann Alexander, visited the families of their Monthly Meeting in 1823.¹⁴ Between 1811 and 1814 Rachel Rowntree of Pickering made numerous journeys, all of which were confined to the Meetings and families within Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting.¹⁵ Other women, however, went further afield, as this chapter will show. As examples here, Christiana Hustler of Bradford and her daughter Sarah may be cited; besides working in their local area, they visited most of the Meetings in England, as well as travelling to Scotland and Europe.¹⁶

Women's ministering activities, both locally and in the wider arena, were facilitated by, and in turn reinforced, the personal networks of support based on friendship and kinship which they cultivated. Denominational networks were central to the working of a whole host of aspects of Quaker life during the period under discussion, from the successful development and expansion of business, trading and commercial concerns to the finding of suitable marriage partners. The importance of local, regional and national networks can be illustrated using marriage statistics. Between 1776 and 1836 929 Yorkshire women Friends married according to Society rules, and in the 805 cases in which the residence of both parties could be ascertained, roughly equal numbers married men from within their Monthly Meeting,

¹³Port. 39 (105), FHL.

¹⁴James Backhouse, *A Memoir of Deborah Backhouse of York* (York, 1828), p. 21.

¹⁵Minute Book of Pickering Women's Monthly Meeting, 1810-1826,' DQR 8/26, HUL; see also *DQB* entry.

¹⁶Minute Books of Brighouse Monthly Meeting 1765-1845,' Carlton Hill MSS Q5 - Q9; 'Minute Books of Brighouse Women's Monthly Meeting, 1760-1832,' Carlton Hill MSS L1-L6, BLUL.

Quarterly Meeting, or elsewhere in Britain (289, 249 and 267 women respectively).¹⁷ The networks which were woven by women in the ministry operated on a number of levels and served several functions, providing mutual help and companionship, and extending encouragement and guidance to ministers with less experience.

The strong bonds which were forged between women ministers grew out of the Society's perspective on the meaning of gender. Not only did its sexually segregated Meeting structure encourage women to look to one another as natural companions in their labours, but the practice of travelling in mixed-sex groups was discouraged by the Society. In 1775, Yearly Meeting reminded the Meetings of Ministers and Elders of the guidelines for conduct among their members, cautioning, 'Against Men's and Women's travelling as Companions in Service, to avoid all Occasions of Offence thereby.'¹⁸ So, for example, in 1774 Christiana Hustler obtained permission to join her friend Esther Tuke of York on a visit to the Meetings of Bristol and its environs. Similarly, in 1820 Rachel Rowntree of Pickering was accompanied by Isabel Richardson of Hull when she visited the families of Rawden Preparative Meeting.¹⁹ Some relationships of long standing evolved between itinerant women ministers. The cousins Phebe Blakes and Elizabeth Copeland of Leeds, for example, made a number of journeys together in Yorkshire and Lancashire in the 1790s, and in 1800 after Elizabeth had moved into

¹⁷Figures compiled using 'Index to the register of marriages in Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1776-1837,' Clifford St MSS, I3, BLUL. The extent to which Quaker families were bound together by an overlapping and continually reinforcing web of marriage alliances running from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries is frequently bewildering. A sense of its complexity is conveyed in Sandys B. Foster, *The Pedigree of Wilson of High Wray and Kendal, and the Families Connected with Them*, second ed. (privately printed, 1890). Foster catalogues the recurring inter-marriages which spanned the country and bound together such leading Quaker families as Wilson, Birkbeck, Jowitt, Crewdson, Pease, Lloyd, Braithwaite and Bragg. Similarly telling is a letter from Samuel Lloyd of Birmingham to his daughter Deborah Stacey, written in 1824 from Kendal and describing a visit he made to Leeds and York. At Leeds: 'We were kindly welcomed by Coz. R[obert] and R[achel] Jowitt & staid with them over an early dinner. Isaac Crewdson and wife [formerly Elizabeth Jowitt, Robert's sister] later arrived, being on their way to Scarborough', to which place they were to be accompanied by their Brother & Sister Jowitt. We proceeded to York that afternoon & were kindly received by Coz. B[enjamin] and Alice Horner ... this was a satisfactory visit, I believe, to thy dear Mother, as Alice is one of her nearest of kin, & they had not met for some years. We were kindly noticed by our Coz. William and M. Richardson, and dined with them on First day.' Alice (Birkbeck) Horner and Rachel (Braithwaite) Lloyd were first cousins, although the title 'cousin' was used to cover a wide array of near and distant kinship ties. See Albright Papers, 1509/4/23, BRL. For a general discussion of the formation and operation of Friends' networks, especially with regard to their importance in trade and business, and of the strains to which they could be subject, see James Walvin, *The Quakers: money and morals* (London, 1997) pp. 81-90. A specific illustration of the importance of networks to Friends' commercial activities see the banking networks catalogued in Pratt, *English Quakers and the First Industrial Revolution*, 'Appendix' pp. 141-153. Business and marriage networks could often mutually reinforce one another: see Arthur Raistrick, *Quakers in Science and Industry: being an account of the Quaker contribution to science and industry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Newton Abbot, 1968), especially pp. 43-6.

¹⁸'Minute Book of London Yearly Meeting, 1774-1777,' p. 247, mf 40, FHL.

¹⁹'Minute Book of Brighouse Women's Monthly Meeting 1760-1777,' Carlton Hill MSS, L1, BLUL.

Knaresborough Meeting they reunited on a visit to the Meetings in Settle.²⁰

As the last example above suggests, kinship ties were instrumental in creating a supportive web of female ministers. Several sets of sisters were ministers, including Phebe Blakes and Esther Clark, and Jane Doncaster and Rachel Rowntree. Mary and Sarah Birkbeck of Settle were sisters-in-law. Mother-daughter relationships featured strongly too: Christiana and Sarah Hustler; Mary Ellis and Mary Hartas; Elizabeth and Ann Priestman.

Probably the most significant Yorkshire kinship network, however, from which a striking number of active and eminent female ministers emerged, was that which embraced the Tukes of York and the Hoylands of Sheffield.²¹ The connection between the two families was established in 1754 with the marriage of William Tuke and Elizabeth Hoyland. They had three sons and two daughters of whom three, Henry, Sarah and Elizabeth, went on to become ministers under the care of their stepmother, the esteemed minister Esther Maud of Bradford. William and Esther's two children who survived into adulthood, Ann and Mabel, also became ministers.²² On the Hoyland side Tabitha and John, two of the children of Elizabeth Tuke's brother, John, became ministers. John Hoyland junior married another minister, Elizabeth Barlow, and his brother William's wife, Barbara, became a minister after her marriage and conviction into the Society.²³ When in 1834 Henry Tuke's daughter, Maria, observed to her sister Esther that she had, 'no share in the family gifts,' she indicated an appreciation of their extraordinary heritage of spiritual capacity.²⁴ Exploring the relationships which were developed by women within the Tuke-Hoyland connections reveals the practical ways in which support and encouragement were dispensed, and the ministry perpetuated through successive generations. Elizabeth (Barlow) Hoyland, for example, undertook her first itinerant ministry in 1784, when she travelled to London and the surrounding area as companion to Esther Tuke.²⁵ Tabitha Hoyland similarly looked to Esther Tuke for guidance when she was struggling with doubts and fears about her call to the ministry in the mid-1770s. In return,

²⁰ Minute Book of Brighouse Women's Monthly Meeting, 1791-1810,' Carlton Hill MSS, L1, BLUL.

²¹ See Appendix 4.

²² William K. and E. Margaret Sessions, *The Tukes of York in the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1971); Wright, *Friends in York*; 'Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting Record of Ministers and Elders,' Clifford Street MSS, I6, BLUL; 'Index to the register of marriages in Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1776-1837,' Clifford St MSS, I3, BLUL.

²³ Sessions, *The Tukes of York*; Barbara Hoyland, 'Memoirs of the Life of Barbara Hoyland, addressed to her children,' MS Box Q 4/1, FHL.

²⁴ Maria Tuke to Esther Priestman, 18-19/5/1834, Tuke 32, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

²⁵ Minute Book of Balby Monthly Meeting, vol. 4: 1777-95,' Q.R.4, SCA.

Esther offered consolation and comfort, reassuring Tabitha that her feelings of inadequacy in fact served to confirm the veracity of her apparent call.²⁶ Not surprisingly, Esther also acted as spiritual mentor to her own children and step-children. For example, Sarah Tuke's first travelling ministry was with her step-mother to the families of Friends in Cumberland and Westmorland in 1780.²⁷ The following year Sarah united with Tabitha Hoyland on what was apparently an emotionally draining journey through Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumberland. During the course of it they received epistolary encouragement, and gentle chastisement, from Esther Tuke who evidently saw it as part of her duty as an acknowledged spiritual leader to raise up the next generation of women ministers:

You must not always be dandled, my dear children, nor care so much for your own [spiritual] food as to care for those of the household I know you are but children in age, but it hath often appeared clear to me since you went forth, that as many of the mothers are removed, and the church stripped, I believe the Master will make you, and some others of obedience, as mothers, teachers and nurses of others, when from age you might expect to be nursed &c..²⁸

In addition, the nationwide networks laid down by Esther Tuke with others of her own generation were open for use by those under her care. For example, when Henry and Ann Tuke planned the execution of their first travelling ministry outside Yorkshire in 1790 they approached their mother's old friend, Jane Pearson of Whitehaven, as a potential fellow-traveller and guide for their visit to Ireland.²⁹

Those women who had been guided by Esther Tuke in turn offered comfort and encouragement to others within their kinship circle. Barbara Hoyland attributed much of her spiritual development to the succour which she received from Elizabeth and Tabitha Hoyland. Her upbringing was Anglican, so William Hoyland was disowned on their marriage. After years of remaining aloof from his family, she attended her first Friends' Meeting for worship in Sheffield, and the couple, with their children, were received into membership in 1792. It was Barbara's turn to be cut off by her family, and she was increasingly drawn to John and Elizabeth Hoyland, and to Tabitha, now married and living in Wellingborough, with whom

²⁶Esther Tuke to Tabitha Hoyland, 13/9/1775, MS Box T (54-5) FHL.

²⁷Sarah [Tuke] Grubb, *Some Account of the Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb* (1992. 3rd ed., London, 1996) p. 16.

²⁸Esther Tuke to Sarah Tuke and Tabitha Hoyland, 12/2/1781, MS Box T (84-7), FHL.

²⁹Henry Tuke to Jane Pearson, 11/11/1790, MS Box 12 (11/47), FHL.

she lodged whilst travelling to London Yearly Meeting.³⁰ In the Tuke family, meanwhile, Ann Alexander assumed the role of spiritual mother to her younger relatives. In 1825, for example, her niece Esther acted as her travelling companion on a visit to Friends in Lancaster.³¹ Esther was acknowledged as a minister by York Meeting in 1846.³² Moreover, a second cell of activity, which maintained close contact with the Yorkshire branch through correspondence and visits, emerged in the east Midlands. It developed as a result of Friends' marriage practices, whereby women automatically became members of their husbands' Meeting. In 1783 Tabitha Hoyland moved to Wellingborough on her marriage to Benjamin Middleton, and her cousin Elizabeth Tuke junior left Yorkshire in 1795 following her marriage to Joseph Wheeler of Hitchin. Two of Tabitha's daughters, Hannah and Maria, became ministers, and Elizabeth Wheeler was an important influence in their lives, especially after the death of their mother in 1809.³³ Elizabeth's own daughter, Esther, was also a minister, and she returned to Yorkshire in 1831 on marrying Benjamin Seebohm of Bradford.³⁴ The combination of the nationwide marriage market which operated within the Society and the customary transfer of women into their husbands' Meeting gave women Friends a relatively high degree of mobility. Over time, therefore, *female ministers' kinship support networks lost their regional exclusivity* and acquired national dimensions.

Friends' attitudes and practices meant that it was most usual for women to group together in networks for support and spiritual guidance, but it should be stressed that it was by no means unknown for women and men to unite for journeys in the ministry. Aside from instances of unobjectionable maternal care or sibling companionship, demonstrated above in the example of Henry Tuke, the practice seems to have been acceptable under two main circumstances: first, when both partners in a married couple were ministers, and secondly when the woman was recognizably the more experienced, and often older, minister of the two. A number of married couples experienced a joint 'concern' to travel in the ministry, for example, Elizabeth and John Hoyland and Martha and William Smith, all off Balby Meeting.³⁵

³⁰Memoir of Barbara Hoyland,' especially pp. 77-85.

³¹Samuel Tuke to Henry Tuke junior, endor. 1825, Tuke 19, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

³²By then she was Esther Smith, having married Thomas Smith of Thirsk in 1831.

³³[Maria Fox,] *Memoirs of Maria Fox* (London, 1846), pp. 22.

³⁴'Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting Record of Ministers and Elders, 1785-1876,' Clifford Street MSS I 6, BLUL; *Private Memoirs of Benjamin and Esther Seebohm* (London, 1873), especially pp. 5-14.

³⁵'Balby Monthly Meeting Minute Book, vol. 4: 1777-95,' Q.R. 4; 'Balby Monthly Meeting Minute Book, vol. 6: 1806-14,' Q.R. 5, SCA.

On a particularly impressive scale was the joint ministry of John and Martha Yeardley of Pontefract and later Pickering Meetings. In the month following their marriage they began travelling together, visiting the Preparative Meetings in Pontefract in January 1827. Thereafter until Martha's death in 1851 they were almost constantly employed as companions in itinerant ministry. They visited almost all areas of England and Wales, and made four journeys to the continent, visiting France, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Greece and the Austrian Empire.³⁶

The spiritual nurturing by more experienced women ministers of Friends of both sexes was accepted within the Society as it represented the fulfilment of the duties of a Mother in Israel. Several young men received emotional and practical support and guidance from such 'Mothers' during the formative periods of their ministering careers. James Backhouse of York made his first ministering journey outside of Yorkshire in 1827 when he joined his 'dear, senior Friends' Mabel Hipsley and Isabel Casson of Hull on a visit to Lincolnshire. He later recalled, 'The conversation of these more experienced Friends was cheering and edifying to me.'³⁷ In Brighouse Monthly Meeting, Barbara Hoyland appears to have assumed the role of spiritual mentor in the mid-1820s to two recently appointed ministers, Benjamin Seebohm and Robert Jowitt. Seebohm made his first journey outside Yorkshire in 1824, accompanying her to the southern counties of England, and in 1827 they were again united on visits to Bradford, Huddersfield and Gildersome Preparative Meetings. In 1825 Jowitt joined her on journeys to Thirsk and Knaresborough Monthly Meetings.³⁸ It was not, of course, unusual for men Friends to act as spiritual guides to their younger brethren. John Yeardley of Pontefract Meeting, for example, was taken under the wing of an esteemed local minister, Joseph Wood.³⁹ What does not seem to have occurred, though, from the Yorkshire evidence at least, was the intimate spiritual nurturing of young women by more senior male Friends.

The overlapping networks which supported and assisted the activities of ministering women were most tightly-knit at local and regional levels. As we have seen, one way in which they were extended more widely was by women's removal to other areas on marriage; another was by the activities of women travelling in the ministry. When women Friends from other areas visited Yorkshire they presented the resident female ministers with opportunities to forge new ties of friendship through the provision of both hospitality and travelling companionship.

³⁶Charles Tylor (ed.) *Memoir and Diary of John Yeardley, Minister of the Gospel* (London, 1859), pp. 159-381.

³⁷S. Backhouse, *Memoir of James Backhouse, by his Sister* (York and London, 1870), p. 32.

³⁸'Minute Book of Brighouse Women's Monthly Meeting, 1818-25,' L4, Carlton Hill MSS. BLUL.

³⁹*Memoir of John Yeardley*, pp. 3-11.

Relationships forged in this way reached not only national, but also international, dimensions.

Several places in the region became centres of hospitality for visiting ministers. Undercliffe near Bradford, for example, the house of John and Christiana Hustler, was a favourite stopping place for many women travelling through Yorkshire during the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. They appear to have been especially attracted there by the presence of Christiana, gaining spiritual refreshment from her company. That these episodes were often times of female-centred friendship building is indicated by the records which some women kept of their time at Undercliffe. In 1769, Mabel Wigham and Alice Rigg from Northumberland stayed there during their visit to Yorkshire, and Wigham recalled, 'After tea we drop[p]ed into silence, and had one of the best of Meetings; I was like a vessel filled & overflowing, and our hearts did rejoice together: Christiana Hustler also rejoiced at being present at this good time, being near her confinement.'⁴⁰ Of her sojourn there in 1791, Sarah Stephenson wrote, 'It was comfortable being with Christiana Hustler and her daughters.'⁴¹ Esther Tuke's house in York had a similar attraction, and women visiting the city in the later eighteenth century consistently sought to spend a few days in her company.⁴²

It was common practice for these friendships forged through hospitality to be further cemented by a period of travelling together in the ministry. An example not only of this type of temporary shared travelling, but also of the way in which the connections which were made as a result might be renewed in active service years later, is provided by the experiences of the mother and daughter ministers from Ireland, Mary and Elizabeth Dudley. Mary first visited York in 1792. Travelling between York and Leeds she was accompanied by Henry and Mabel Tuke, and after holding a public meeting in Leeds the three continued to Bradford together. From Bradford, she was accompanied to Keighley by Christiana Hustler's daughter, Sarah.⁴³ In 1820 Mary returned to Yorkshire, this time accompanied by her daughter Elizabeth who kept a detailed account of the local Friends who joined them in their work. At Doncaster, for example, they stayed with Martha and William Smith, and Martha joined with them on their

⁴⁰Journal of Mabel Wigham,' MS Box D4/5, FHL.

⁴¹[Sarah Stephenson,] *Memoirs of the Life and Travels in the Service of the Gospel of Sarah Stephenson* (London, 1807), p. 111.

⁴²See *ibid.*, p. 122; Elizabeth Dudley, *The Life of Mary Dudley* (London, 1825), p. 135. Ruth Follows was greatly disappointed on not finding Esther Tuke at home when she visited Yorkshire in 1775: 'William Tuke from York met us, and with him we went to his house; his worthy wife was then at Scarborough labouring in her allotment [i.e., ministry] and no small cross it was to us not to have her company.' Samuel Stansfield, *Memoir of Ruth Follows, late of Castle Donnington, Leicester* (Liverpool, 1829), p. 87.

⁴³*Life of Mary Dudley*, pp. 138-9.

visits to the families of Friends in the town.⁴⁴ About a month later, they had the company of William Richardson of York and his cousin Isabel Richardson from Hull. When they left Yorkshire, Isabel Richardson and the Smiths continued with them through Lincolnshire, the east Midlands and East Anglia.⁴⁵ The friendship between Elizabeth Dudley and Isabel Richardson was sustained by letter during subsequent years, and in 1828, when Elizabeth paid a second religious visit to Yorkshire, they arranged to reunite. For almost a year the two women journeyed together throughout the northern counties of England and into Scotland.⁴⁶

The networks developed by female ministers during the late eighteenth and nineteenth also had a transatlantic dimension. Since the seventeenth century, women Friends from both Britain and America had been frequent voyagers between the Quaker communities in the two countries which helped to preserve a sense of common identity.⁴⁷ Historians of women's political activism in the nineteenth century have indicated that for British Friends their transatlantic connections were an important source of support and inspiration in, for example the campaigns against slavery and the early Victorian suffrage movement.⁴⁸ Exploring the connections developed by some of Yorkshire's women ministers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries illuminates the well-established patterns of transatlantic cooperation on which these later movements drew. Of particular importance during the period were the links made between the women of the Tuke and Hustler families on the one hand, and the visiting American minister, Rebecca Jones on the other. Jones was one of a large party of American ministers who made a religious visit to England in the mid-1780s. She was saddened by the low condition in which she found the Society in the country of its birth; lamenting to one of her fellow-American travellers, John Pemberton: 'Oh! how has my heart mourned in remembering that in this part of the world, where the glorious light of the gospel so eminently broke forth ... there should be such a falling away among the descendants of the great and good, that in most of the places I have visited, there is but little left but the form.'

⁴⁴Charles Tylor (ed.), *Memoirs of Elizabeth Dudley, consisting chiefly of selections from her journal and correspondence* (London, 1861), p. 103.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 105-113.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 155-174.

⁴⁷See Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: the story of Quaker women in America* (Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 33-41.

⁴⁸Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: the British campaigns, 1780-1870* (London, 1992), p. 127; Sandra Stanley Holton, 'From anti-slavery to suffrage militancy: the Bright circle, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the British women's movement,' in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds.), *Suffrage and Beyond: international feminist perspectives* (New York, 1994), pp. 213-233.

Later in the letter, however, she qualified her gloomy observations, remarking, 'I love Yorkshire, many Friends in it are near to my very life; ... some of the present generation there will be preserved, and in the right time show themselves to Israel, equipped with the holy armour, on the right hand and on the left.'⁴⁹

The friendships which Jones built with several of Yorkshire's leading women Friends originated at the historic Yearly Meeting of 1784, where the combined efforts of British and American Friends achieved the official establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting. The committee of nine British and three American women who put their case before the men's Meeting included Jones, Christiana Hustler, Esther Tuke and Tabitha Middleton.⁵⁰ In addition, Jones and Hustler shared lodgings in London at the house of Joseph Gurney Bevan, and at the end of the Yearly Meeting Hustler felt divinely called to offer herself as Jones' travelling companion in Britain.⁵¹ They remained together for a year, visiting Meetings in England and Scotland 'much united in spirit and labour,' as Jones told one of her correspondents.⁵² In 1786 they reunited to undertake family visits to Friends in Leeds.⁵³ Undercliffe was the base for their several journeys, and whilst resting there Jones formed a friendship with Christiana's eldest daughter, Sarah, with whom she corresponded until the latter's death in 1814.⁵⁴ During September 1784 Jones and Hustler stayed with Esther and William Tuke in York, and in 1786 Jones, accompanied by Esther, made a series of visits to the city's Quaker families.⁵⁵ Her closest friendships in the Tuke family seem, however, to have been with the younger generation. In 1785-6, for example, she paid religious visits to Ireland, Wales and the West

⁴⁹William J. Allinson (ed.), *Memorials of Rebecca Jones* (London, 1849), pp. 85-6.

⁵⁰The American party visiting Britain was composed of seven men and five women: Jones, Patience Brayton, Rebecca Wright, Mehetabel Jenkins and Sarah Dillwyn (whose husband, George, was also part of the group). Jones, Brayton, Wright and Jenkins attended the London Yearly Meeting of 1784 and along with two of their male compatriots, William Matthews and Robert Valentine, both encouraged British women Friends to press for the formal institution of their own Yearly Meeting and assisted them in presenting their case to the men's Meeting. See Margaret Hope Bacon, 'The establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting: a transatlantic concern,' *JFHS*, especially pp. 158-60; *idem.*, *Mothers of Feminism*, pp. 39-40.

⁵¹*Memorials of Rebecca Jones*, pp. 62-3. The close friendship through shared ministry which Jones developed with some of the women of Yorkshire was not the only such relationship to originate in the 1784 Yearly Meeting. Two other members of the committee to the men's Meeting, Martha Routh of Manchester and the American Rebecca Wright, travelled together throughout London, the Midlands and the North. See, [Martha Routh,] *Memoirs of the Life, Travels and Religious Experiences of Martha Routh* (York, 1822), pp. 44-45.

⁵²The women parted company at Yearly Meeting in 1785, after which Jones described herself as, 'a lonely dove without its mate': *Memorials of Rebecca Jones*, pp. 68-101.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 102-104, 340-3, 348-9 and 351-2.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 83-4 and 123.

Country, as well as to families in Sheffield, with Sarah Grubb.⁵⁶ Both during and after her stay in Britain Jones corresponded regularly with Sarah, as well as with her sisters Ann and Elizabeth.⁵⁷ Her letters combined friendly greetings with spiritual counsel, such as when she wrote to Ann Tuke:

I often look with tender desire towards thee my dear, & have a comfortable hope that if thou steps along in a state of patient submissive dependence on that Wisdom which can only direct in safety, preservation and an increase in the solid depth & ground of religious experience will be witnessed.⁵⁸

The personal friendship was renewed in 1804 when Ann (now Alexander) travelled to America. She and Jones reunited in the latter's home city of Philadelphia, where they jointly undertook family visits and held public Meetings.⁵⁹ Alexander's letters home to her brother, Henry, reveal astonishment and dismay at the conditions which she encountered when travelling to visit Friends in frontier communities,⁶⁰ yet she also reflected:

I now take it for granted there is a great similarity in our religious society in every part of the world. There are those amongst them in this land who having been under the same hand of divine formation appear so similar in their views, & feel so congenial with ourselves, as to excite the exclamation, 'is not this bone of my bone & flesh of my flesh.'⁶¹

For Quaker ministers, shared religious experiences and denominational culture created a sense of common identity which transcended national boundaries.

The religious journeys which many women ministers felt called to undertake had

⁵⁶*Ibid*, pp. 111-116 and 123-34; 'Minute Book of Pickering Women's Monthly Meeting , 1781-93,' DQR 8-23, HUL.

⁵⁷See 'Copies of letters from Sarah Tuke Grubb, 1785-90, mainly to Rebecca Jones. copied by her sister, Mabel Hipsley,' Tuke 13, Tuke Papers, BIHR; Letters of Rebecca Jones to Ann Alexander [and others], Port. 15 (3-15), FHL.

⁵⁸Port. 15 (4), FHL.

⁵⁹*Memorials of Rebecca Jones*, pp. 311-316. When Alexander departed for New York Jones wrote, 'We parted in the love of our heavenly Father, and my prayers are for her preservation every way, as for my own soul.' *Ibid.*, p. 316

⁶⁰See letters from Ann Alexander to Henry Tuke dated 11/12/1803, 20/5/1804, 1/9/1804 and 26/2/1805 in Tuke 17, Tuke Papers, BIHR. For an account of the life of a female minister from a Quaker frontier community see Algie I. Newlin, 'Charity Cook,' in Carol Stoneburner and John Stoneburner (eds.), *The Influence of Quaker Women in American History: biographical studies* (New York, 1986), pp.151-189..

⁶¹Ann Alexander to Henry Tuke, 11/12/1803, Tuke 17, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

implications for the domestic lives of both themselves and their families. Family members had a spiritual duty of resignation to the alternative demands which ministerial obligations might place on their womenfolk. Children raised in families in which women were active in the ministry experienced first-hand the reality of female itinerancy. Some women directly combined maternal responsibilities with short religious engagements. When Mabel Wigham visited Whitby in 1766 she lodged with a minister, Hannah Hart, and her husband. They accompanied Wigham on the next stage of her journey, and she recalled: 'Hannah Hart took her child upon her lap when it was time for us to part, & rode behind her husband 3 miles with me to William Ro[w]ntree's.'⁶² Ruth Follows and Martha Routh travelled through Yorkshire in 1775, staying in Leeds at the house of John and Sarah Elam. When they departed: 'Our Friend Elam, with her children, accompanied us to Rawden (her husband being gone to the yearly meeting in London) where we again had close work.'⁶³ Those growing up in this environment were socialised to accept as natural that women in the ministry had duties to fulfil which might override their domestic responsibilities, as the remarks of William Henry Alexander, whose mother Ann was York Meeting's most active travelling minister in the early nineteenth century, to his future wife Sophia Alexander, illustrate:

Sensible that ... he who loves even the most tender and legitimate object of endearment more than his Redeemer, is not worthy of Him, I feel anxious that no personal sacrifice on my part ... may ever be allowed to stand in competition with His paramount claims, or be in the way of thy pursuing the path of duty which leads to solid peace.⁶⁴

The demands which their religious calling placed on women ministers could test the dedication of their husbands to a high degree. When Barbara Sharples of Settle received confirmation from her Monthly Meeting that she was free to marry Jonathan Drewry of Pardshaw in Cumbria, she also sought and obtained a certificate to take to Pardshaw Meeting authorising her to travel to Ireland immediately after the marriage.⁶⁵ Sarah Grubb made several journeys accompanied by her husband Robert, an Elder; however, the first religious visit on which she

⁶²Journal of Mabel Wigham,' MS Box D4/5, FHL.

⁶³*Memoir of Ruth follows*, p. 78. Sarah Elam was an Elder in Brighouse Monthly Meeting.

⁶⁴'York Monthly Meeting certificates of Friends traveling in the ministry, 1686-1862,' mf185, BIHR; *Memorials of William H. and Sophia Alexander of Ipswich* (London, 1867), p. 5.

⁶⁵'Minute Book of Settle Women's Monthly Meeting, 1771-92,' Carlton Hill MSS, SE3, BLUL. Settle women acknowledged that this was not customary practice on the part of the Meeting from which a woman was departing on marriage, but justified the action on the grounds that, 'her concern to visit Ireland pretty directly seemed to require it.'

embarked as a married woman, just two weeks after their wedding, was to Scotland with Mary Proud of Hull.⁶⁶ Enshrined in Quaker beliefs, this acceptance of women's obligations to fulfil genuine religious engagements without censure, irrespective of their domestic ties, was part of the supportive framework provided by the Society to facilitate women's ministering activities. In 1812, Martha Smith of Doncaster wrote to her friend and prospective travelling companion to the West Country, Mary Sanderson of London, describing her deep mental anguish at the prospect of the journey, but acknowledging that during these trials, 'my dear Husband and some of my children have been partakers, and secretly sympathise and help me on my way, instead of retarding my going forth, all w^{ch} is grateful to my feelings.'⁶⁷ Husbands could provide practical help too, as John Hustler did when he gave the use of his horse and chaise to his wife Christiana and Rebecca Jones to enable them to travel throughout Britain with relative ease.⁶⁸

Women travelling in the ministry also needed practical help at home, as someone had to fill their place as household manager. In the case of the Tuke family, when Esther was absent from York on religious engagements in the 1770s, the role fell largely to Sarah as the eldest daughter. It is evident, however, that Sarah dreaded having the burden of domestic responsibilities laid on her shoulders. Her apprehensiveness is apparent in a letter to her cousin Tabitha Hoyland written in 1772 when she was just sixteen years old, regarding Esther's recent indication that she felt called to leave home: 'must confess I am a little at a loss how to reconcile this, it being the washing, pig killing and cleaning again, the Q[uarternly] M[eeting] &c., &c.'⁶⁹ On several occasions in the future when left in charge, she confided to Tabitha her anxiety and sense of inadequacy in this role. In 1778, for example, she wrote, 'I never felt more unfit for the task, nor more ready to query, Who is equal to it? and to conclude, Surely not I.'⁷⁰ It is tempting to read Sarah's subsequent emergence as an itinerant minister herself as a convenient escape route from a duty which she clearly abhorred, but such an interpretation seems too crude. A more credible suggestion might be that Sarah's intensely spiritual upbringing, combined with her sense of incompetence in the sphere of household management,

⁶⁶*Life of Sarah Grubb*, pp. 40-5.

⁶⁷Port. 39 (12), FHL.

⁶⁸*Memorials of Rebecca Jones*, p. 80.

⁶⁹Sarah Tuke to Tabitha Hoyland, 2/1772, Tuke 14, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

⁷⁰*Life of Sarah Grubb*, p. 269. See also *ibid.*, p. 266; letter to Tabitha Hoyland 18/4/1774, Tuke 14, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

underpinned her belief that she was destined for a different arena of responsibility.

For women ministers in the Society of Friends, the domestic sphere was in no sense regarded as the extent of their designated world. This perspective was buttressed by Friends' views on the place and function of the Quaker home within the Society. Like their contemporaries in other denominations, they believed that the proper running of home and family were fundamental for the maintenance and prosperity of their particular beliefs and practices, but their conceptualization of the Quaker home was quite different from the closed haven for the nuclear family envisaged by some Anglican evangelical writers of the period. Within the Quaker community, the internal workings of each household were to remain open and visible, rather than separate and self-contained. Domestic and community life were fully integrated, without any conceptual distinction between the functions of the individual home and the wider Quaker world. It must be acknowledged that this tendency was not peculiar to Quakerism. Historians of nineteenth-century evangelical sects, most notably sectarian Methodism, have begun to point to some of the ways in which the relationship between the denominational community and the sectarian home had implications for religious women, and confounds attempts to categorise their experiences in terms of a public/private dichotomy. Deborah Valenze indicates that the association of household, workplace and place of worship as a feature of the lives of those from whom sectarian Methodism drew its converts meant that the home was not conceptualized as a 'place apart.' Rather,

popular religion recognised the *domus* as part of a wider universe. The household was the locus of economic and social relations intrinsic to labouring life, and no distinction between home and work, or work and life, obtained. Women, furthermore, derived modes of behaviour and power in sectarian Methodism from their place within and outside the home.

Linda Wilson has recently focussed on the domestic religious practices of Wesleyan Methodist, Primitive Methodist, Particular Baptist and Congregational women in the middle third of the nineteenth century. She demonstrates that denominational affiliation could offer women opportunities to undertake functions such as philanthropic work, directing family prayers and the provision of hospitality which spanned the supposed boundary between 'public' and 'private' activities.⁷¹

An exploration of the range of spaces in which Yorkshire's women Friends exercised

⁷¹Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: female preaching and popular religion in industrial England* (Princeton, 1985), especially pp. 223-3; Linda Wilson, "'She succeeds with cloudless brow ...': How active was the spirituality of nonconformist women in the home during the period 1825-1875?" *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998), pp. 347-359.

their ministry suggests that the gendered conceptual categories of 'public' and 'private' offer little help in understanding the lives of female Quaker ministers. Friends' understanding of worship as any gathering together in silence for the purpose of waiting for divine direction meant that ministry was by no means confined to those testimonies or supplications which were uttered within the Meeting House, and the home was an important site for the performance of worship. On occasion, as the example of Mabel Wigham's visit to Undercliffe cited above illustrates, worship and ministry in which women played a leading part could occur spontaneously when several Friends gathered together socially. Sarah Stephenson recorded similar incidents when she and Ann Byrd lodged there in 1791, as in the company of the Hustler womenfolk and several Friends who came to meet the visitors, 'we had some favoured opportunities.'⁷² Domestic worship and ministry also took more organised forms, though, and throughout the period under discussion here the accounts of women's travelling ministries include numerous records of their visiting families of Friends in their own houses. These meetings were a vital part of the attempt to reinvigorate the Society at grass-roots level, and show clearly the open relationship which home and family were expected to have with the Society as a whole. Moreover, a type of female spiritual leadership was being exercised in the domestic sphere during the visits which was quite different both from that which women in other denominations exercised as preachers, teachers and mothers within their homes, and from the spontaneous domestic Quaker worship noted above. Women Friends were acting their capacity as ministers, entering the households of their co-religionists with official denominational authority. This spiritual care was often extended by a minister to those within her own Meeting: for example, Tabitha Hoyland, Elizabeth Dickenson and Mary Rutherford visited Balby families in 1779, and Martha Thornhill visited those in Pickering in 1827.⁷³ Families in Meetings which were identified as weak and struggling could be special targets for the attentions of ministers from elsewhere in Quarterly Meeting. Knaresborough, for example, received a succession of visits from concerned Friends, including Esther Brady and Elizabeth Dickenson of Balby in 1787, Sarah Hustler and Hannah Broadhead of Brighouse in 1811, Rachel Rowntree and Isabel Richardson of Pickering in 1820, Mary Trickett of Balby

⁷²*Memoirs of Sarah Stephenson*, p. 111. Although I have not found any examples relating specifically to Yorkshire, there is no reason to suppose that this type of spontaneous, female-led domestic worship was unusual. Susanna Boone Worcester recorded several instances of it in her diaries, such as the following in September 1783: 'In the afternoon it pleased infinite goodness to break in upon my mind in my own house, & my two Nieces Lamley & another young woman & myself were favoured with a tender opportunity together.' 'Diaries of Susanna Boone: vol. 2, 1780-6', 5/9/1783, QWD reel 1; see also *ibid.*, 'vol. 1, 1773-1780,' 1/6/1777, 17/1/1779, 26/7/1779. It is evident that the family's two maidservants joined in the worship on the last two occasions.

⁷³Minute Book of Balby Monthly Meeting, 1777-95,' Q.R.4, SCA; 'Minute Book of Pickering Women's Monthly Meeting, 1820-7,' DQR 8/9, HUL.

in 1823 and Barbara Hoyland of Brighouse in 1825.⁷⁴ Sources for uncovering what actually passed in these intimate religious encounters are scarce, but it seems that they could be moving occasions. Samuel Tuke accompanied his aunt, Ann Alexander, and Sarah Baker on visits to the families of York Meeting in 1826. He wrote to inform his wife Priscilla that they had held six 'sittings' that day, during which, 'Our interview with the children of the late E. Procter was a very affecting one.'⁷⁵ When Sarah Lambley of Bristol visited the families of Friends in Balby in 1813, the Elder Richard Cockin acted as her escort at Doncaster. He wrote to his niece Mary Fox in Plymouth, 'They were memorable opportunities at the two families of the Baynes, where it was clearly evinced that revelation had not ceased.'⁷⁶ In these instances, there was some spiritual communion with the visited, but when this fellowship was lacking such a personal form of ministry could be extremely difficult. After Sarah Tuke went to see families in Owstwick and Cave Meeting in 1782 she wrote, 'It was, I think, the most trying service of the kind that I have ever had any sense of; the general unfeelingness and impenetrability of the visited rendered the labour almost without hope.'⁷⁷

Similar to these family visits were the private meetings which women held with specific groups of Friends who were united for a particular reason under the same roof. The most common ministry of this kind took place in Friends' boarding schools, and will be looked at in greater detail later in this chapter as part of the discussion of the role and function of Quaker women in the education of Friends' children. During the period covered by this study the female ministers of Yorkshire were also called upon to serve in another institutional context, providing spiritual support to the Friends imprisoned in York Castle for their religious testimony against the payment of tithes. Throughout the eighteenth century the cases of Friends being imprisoned for tithe testimony became fewer as a result both of the Church's perfection of the system of distraint of goods in lieu, and of the increasing concentration of Friends in urban areas. The imprisonment of eight Friends from the village of Lothersdale in Settle Monthly Meeting between 1795 and 1797 at the suit of the rector of Carleton was the last instance of this penalty being exercised in Yorkshire.⁷⁸ One of the prisoners, Henry

⁷⁴'Minute Books of Knaresborough Monthly Meeting,' 1773-96, 1796-1811, 1811-1834, A3, A5 and A8, Carlton Hill MSS, BLUL.

⁷⁵Samuel Tuke to Priscilla Tuke, 18/4/1826, Tuke 21, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

⁷⁶Port. 39 (110), FHL.

⁷⁷*Life of Sarah Grubb*, p. 39.

⁷⁸Thistlethwaite, *Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting*, pp. 339-42.

Wormall, kept a journal, and perhaps not surprisingly the key events which he recorded were the regular visits made by ministering Friends to hold Meetings for worship and offer moral support. Women ministers, and especially those from York Meeting, were the most frequent visitors, and from the ministry of some in particular Wormall drew solace. After one visit by Ann Tuke he wrote: 'I thought it was like as if she was permitted to venture through the Host & bring water as from the Well of Bethlehem, and I was well refreshed.'⁷⁹ Other debtors in the Castle also occasionally attended these Meetings for worship.

Besides these intimate sessions for worship which ministering women Friends convened, some also obtained permission from their Meetings to hold so-called 'public meetings'. These were specifically intended to provide opportunities for those of other denominations to worship in the manner and under the guidance of Friends. Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a succession of women from Yorkshire Quarterly Meetings were willing to engage in such service, both within Yorkshire and beyond. In 1787, for example, Esther Tuke, her daughter Ann and Martha English were accompanied by the visiting Americans George Dillwyn and Zachariah Dicks in holding public meetings in the southern Dales. Esther told Tabitha Middleton that some Methodists had been especially receptive of their efforts and offered congenial company, especially as they were, 'not so settled down [i.e. conformist] as not to unite in the doctrine of silent worship.'⁸⁰ During the 1820s Barbara Hoyland held numerous public meetings: for example, in Leeds in 1822, in Devon and Cornwall in 1824, in Knaresborough and Thirsk Monthly Meetings in 1825 and in Halifax in 1827.⁸¹ Martha Thornhill of Whitby held public meetings there and in Scarborough in 1829 and 1832 respectively, and after moving to live in Pontefract Monthly

⁷⁹Besides Ann Tuke, other regular visitors to the prison were Sarah and Barbara Priestman, Mary Tate, Elizabeth Tuke, Ellen Abrahams, Henry Tuke, Mary Proud and Elizabeth and John Hoyland. Henry Wormall's accounts of these visits provide rare information about the actual content of women's preaching. Recounting the ministry of Mary Proud of Hull during a meeting in 1796, he wrote that she, 'stood up and preached both lively, powerful & encouraging to me, she described a state of fear, that some of us might be tossed with at times, least [sic] we should not be able to endure to the end, hut she described that state to be a safe state, & very encouragingly she spoke to my comfort; she said the Enemy wo^d strive to attack us on the weak side; she advised to watchfulness unto prayer & hold fast that which we have & let no man take our Crown, & she came to a good conclusion at last, be those faithful unto death and I will give thee a Crown of life, w^{ch} were her last words; this meeting was very satisfying.' See, 'Henry Wormall's Journal, 1795-7,' MS Box K 1/17, FHL.

⁸⁰Esther Tuke to Tabitha Middleton, 10/3/1787, MS Box T (70-71). FHL. Methodist chapels frequently served as the venue for Friends' public Meetings, although the audience usually came from a much wider constituency. In 1820, for example, during her visit to Yorkshire Elizabeth Dudley held meetings in the Methodist chapels at Wakefield, where she felt that, 'the spirit of unbelief was strong in some of the audience,' and at Bradford, where the meeting was attended by nearly three thousand people. See *Memoirs of Elizabeth Dudley*, pp. 101-3.

⁸¹'Minute Books of Brighthouse Women's Monthly Meeting,' 1818-25 and 1825-9, L4 and L5, Carlton Hill MSS, BLUL.

Meeting, she revisited Pickering in order to convene public meetings in 1832.⁸² None of the Yorkshire women who engaged in public ministry among non-Friends has left an account that she faced hostility in her preaching, on the grounds of either her Quakerism or her sex. Nevertheless, it does seem to have been regarded as prudent practice for them to have the company of one or two men when ministering in this way. Henry Tuke joined up with his sister Ann and her female companion when she was holding public meetings in Lincolnshire in 1795, and remarked that he had felt obliged to do so on account of, 'their having no other companion, and the frequent Line of their Service rendering one of the Masculine Gender desirable.'⁸³

Ministering women were thus able to undertake functions of official religious leadership across a range of spaces from the intimate setting of Friends' houses to public places where they came under the scrutiny of non-Friends. That they were permitted to do so resulted from the Society's perception of itself as a community without fixed internal boundaries, but which was separate from the wider world and bound by its own codes of practice. Any deeds performed with the sanction of the community, however unconventional in the eyes of the unregenerate 'world' could not be considered as transgressive. If female ministers' activities are considered from the perspective of contemporary Quakerism it is clear that the concepts of 'private' and 'public' had distinct sectarian meanings: they were not linked to gendered spaces, but simply denoted the exclusion or involvement of those who were not Friends.

Female ministers occupied an authoritative and respected position in the Society which permitted them to engage in a broad range of sectarian leadership activities, and the close ties which they forged with one another facilitated the performance of their official duties. It is important to keep in view, however, that ministers were only a tiny and select minority of the female population of Yorkshire's Quaker community. Furthermore, investigation into their family backgrounds and social status indicates that they emerged predominantly from among certain sections of the Society.

⁸²'Minute Book of Pickering Monthly Meeting, 1827-31,' DQR 8/10, HUL; 'Minute Book of Pickering Women's Monthly Meeting, 1826-49,' DQR 8/27, HUL.

⁸³Henry Tuke to Mary Maria Tuke, 9/9/1795, Tuke 6, Tuke Papers, BIHR. Accounts of women ministering in public suffering outright assault in this period are rare. Sarah Lynes Grubb recalled how in Leicester attempts were made to silence her as a woman preaching, the authorities claiming, 'that which drew [the crowd's] attention to God was prohibited.' She soon began preaching again, and despite the protection of some local men Friends, she came under physical attack: 'I had, as usual, some dear and tender friends among the brethren, who accompanied and stood by me in such great exercise. These partook of the insults offered - the people throwing at them: indeed somebody was unfeeling enough to bring hot melted lead and cast it at us; some of which was found on some part of the clothing of one dear friend.' [Sarah (Lynes) Grubb,] *Selection from the Letters of the Late Sarah Grubb, formerly Sarah Lynes* (Sudbury, 1848), p. 5.

It has not been possible to trace the background of every minister, but the available information suggests that women Friends who were called to the ministry were most likely to belong to families within what might be termed the middle socio-economic strata of the Society: i.e. those whose livelihoods derived from merchant, manufacturing or retail activities.⁸⁴ Focussing again on the four Monthly Meetings of York, Brighouse, Pickering and Settle, only one woman, Mary Birkbeck of Settle, can be positively identified as belonging to a professional family. She was born into the Lancaster banking family of Dilworth, and in 1779 married John Birkbeck, a partner with his cousin in the Settle (later Craven) Bank.⁸⁵ Consistently under-represented by female ministers were farming families: only Mary Tate of Cottingwith, Sarah Baker of Askham Bryan, Rachel Rowntree of Riseborough, and Deborah Wilson of Thornton in Craven, came from families engaged in agriculture. Moreover, in two of these cases, it appears that ties to farming with neither exclusive nor entrenched: John Tate, whilst listed as a husbandman by York Meeting in 1790, was described as a coal dealer after 1800; Richard Wilson, described as a yeoman in the membership list of 1813 and presumably so when Deborah was acknowledged as a minister in 1825, had been a calico manufacturer at the time of their marriage in 1802.⁸⁶ Given the high proportion of farming Friends, especially in Pickering and Settle Meetings, this figure is strikingly low. Further down the economic scale, in Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting as a whole no women ministers came from very humble backgrounds in the labouring or servant classes. Of the fifteen women ministers in Brighouse between 1791 and 1831, the socio-economic position of eleven can be ascertained. Ten were the daughters, wives or widows of merchants, manufacturers or retailers and the eleventh, Mary Ellis, was mistress alongside her husband of the Friends' boarding school at Gildersome. In York for the same period, aside from Sarah Baker and Mary Tate, there were eight female ministers, for whom information could be gathered on seven, all of whom either belonged to middle ranking families, or, in the case of Ellen Abraham, engaged in a middle-status occupation herself. The dominant position of such Friends in the Society was reflected too in the backgrounds of male ministers, although it was rare but not unknown for men from very

⁸⁴See Appendix 3.

⁸⁵See: entry for Mary Birkbeck in *DQB*; Birkbeck, *The Birkbecks of Westmorland and their Descendants*, p. 117; Brayshaw and Robinson, *History of Giggleswick*, p. 195. Mary's sister-in-law Sarah Birkbeck who was also a minister has been classified as belonging to a merchant family as her and John's father remained concerned in that line of trade, from which the banking had developed.

⁸⁶See 'York Monthly Meeting Lists of Members: vol. 1, 1790-1840,' Clifford Street MSS, K4.1; 'Settle Monthly Meeting List of Members, 1813-37' Carlton Hill MSS, D2; 'Index to Register of Marriages in Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1776-1837,' Clifford Street MSS, all in BLUL..

humble backgrounds to emerge as ministers. William Sowerby of Pontefract Meeting, for example, was a servant at Ackworth School, and Joseph Brown, one of the so-called 'Lothersdale Prisoners', was an impoverished stone-mason.⁸⁷

A wide range of economic experience was represented in the milieu of merchant, manufacturer and retailer from which the overwhelming majority of ministers came. At one end of the spectrum were families like the Hustlers of Bradford. John Hustler, Christiana's husband, was described as a merchant, woolstapler and woolcomber, and he amassed a fortune in the wool trade which enabled him to buy the ninety-acre estate of Undercliffe.⁸⁸ Somewhat lower down the economic ladder were families such as the Tukes of York in which successive generations of eldest sons were grocers and wholesale tea dealers. Among the numerous ministers from retailing backgrounds is the sole example of a woman from the four sample Meetings who traded on her own account, Martha Thornhill of Whitby. She undertook the running of her husband's drapery business after he died leaving it heavily in debt and during this period was acknowledged as a minister. Once she had restored the solvency of the business she was able to sell up, and soon afterwards began travelling in the ministry.⁸⁹

Thornhill's experiences actually offer some suggestion of the reasons why women from families engaged in farming, or where the head was a manual worker, were unlikely to come forward as ministers. Women's labour may have been vital to the household economy of these families, rendering it practically impossible for them to undertake the full range of ministering duties. As the spectre of poverty and the need to work may have made the ministry difficult to reconcile with the lives of lower class women, so at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum those from professional families may have experienced pressures of politeness which conflicted with sectarian demands. Changes over time which occurred within the Birkbeck family, for example, reflect what has been recognised as a common tendency towards conformity among wealthy Friends during the nineteenth century. Mary Birkbeck's children all married within the Society, but a minister visiting her eldest son John, a partner in the family's increasingly affluent banking concern, and his wife Margaret in 1832 observed that 'outward comforts have too much place in their minds.'⁹⁰ When their children came to marry

⁸⁷See their entries in *DQB*.

⁸⁸H. R. Hodgson, *The Society of Friends in Bradford: a record of 270 years* (Bradford, 1926) pp. 38-9; Arthur Raistrick, *Quakers in Science and Industry: being an account of the Quaker contributions of science and industry during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Newton Abbot, 1968) pp. 78-80.

⁸⁹See her entry in *DQB*; 'Pickering Monthly Meeting List of Members, 1813-37,' DQR 8/33, HUL.

⁹⁰'Elizabeth Robson's Diaries, 1832-43,' QWD reel 7.

came to marry they did so outside the Society, with all three daughters who survived into adulthood becoming wives of local clergymen.⁹¹ The preponderance of Friends in the ministry whose backgrounds were in trade and industry cannot, however, be explained solely by negative factors which made those from other economic sectors unlikely to undertake such service. As James Walvin has suggested, the cultural development of Quakerism during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries underpinned the successful business and commercial activities of many of its members. For example: the Society cultivated a reputation for probity and diligence in business matters; it carefully monitored individual financial welfare, and through its networks there operated a well-developed system for organising apprenticeships.⁹² Religious and secular profession harmonised so that, in a positive way, middle-ranking households engaged in manufacture, merchant and retail activities were those who were most likely to be closely wedded to the beliefs, practices and values of the Society. This commitment would have been reflected in their lifestyles, creating an environment conducive to 'plainness' and spiritual self-examination, and both sympathetic to the demands of ministerial activity and financially able to bear its burden on their household in the absence of female - and for that matter male - members.

The exercise and impact of Friends' discipline

The extraordinary level of denominational authority and scope for autonomous activity possessed by women ministers rested upon their acknowledged status as members of the spiritual elite. For both ministers and rank and file members, though, their lives were shaped to some degree by the fact that they belonged to the Society. Quakerism provided a framework of rules, practices and support networks which aimed to organise and regulate Friends' daily lives. In turn, all members were expected to play an active role in upholding internal discipline, not only by their own guarded conduct, but also through participation in business Meetings.

As chapter one above noted, women's business Meetings at all levels were institutionally subordinate to men's, but evidence from the Yorkshire Meetings does not indicate that they were the mere charades suggested by Davidoff and Hall in their assertion

⁹¹Birkbeck, *Birkbecks of Westmorland*, p. 118.

⁹²Walvin, *The Quakers*, especially ch. 3.

that, 'Quaker women were no more the decision-makers in their denomination than their Anglican, Congregational or Unitarian sisters.'⁹³ Judgements on major issues such as the disownment or admission of members could not, it is true, be made by women Friends alone, and they had no jurisdiction over disciplinary matters relating solely to men, but they played an important part in dealing with cases of delinquency or applications for membership involving women. A female member suspected of misconduct was privately visited by one or two women Friends appointed to the task, and if they felt the matter required official investigation the men were informed. The men's and women's Meetings then each selected one or more Friends to form a joint committee to investigate the matter further and report their findings. Disciplinary action was then taken, or the case dropped, according to the recommendations of the committee, and a similar practice obtained with respect to admissions. The fact that official minutes recording final decisions were drafted in the Men's Meeting should not detract from the equal part which women played in counselling on the appropriate conclusion. In 1797, for example, Sarah and Margaret King of Todmorden were disowned after a joint committee from Brighouse Monthly Meeting consisting of Robert and Mary Crossland, Hannah Greenwood and James Kaye had investigated accusations of unspecified 'misconduct' made against them.⁹⁴ In Settle Meeting in 1817, Mary Birkbeck, Deborah Wilson and Grace Wormald, acting in conjunction with Richard Wilson, John Tatham and John King, junior, judged that the children of John and Isabel Brown should be received into membership, but not those of John and Esther Binns.⁹⁵ No other denomination granted its female members a similar share of responsibility in the government of their church, including the contemporaneous Methodist sects which sanctioned female preaching. Moreover, women were licensed to play a formal part in business Meetings not by a special dispensation, but in their ordinary capacity as members life of the Society.⁹⁶ All Friends were encouraged to participate in the affairs of their Meetings for discipline, and it was this right which was withdrawn from individuals who were disowned.

In her study of York Meeting, Sheila Wright found that despite this theoretical inclusiveness, in practice the women's Meeting was dominated by a small group of individuals,

⁹³Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987), p. 139.

⁹⁴Brighouse Women's Monthly Meeting Minute Book, 1791-1810' p. 156, Carlton Hill MSS L2, BLUL.

⁹⁵'Minute Book of Settle Monthly Meeting, 1787-1821,' pp. 416-7, Carlton Hill MSS H7, BLUL.

⁹⁶David Shorney, "'Women may preach but men must govern": gender roles in the growth and development of the Bible Christian denomination,' *Church History*, 34 (1998), pp. 309-322.

predominantly the wives and daughters of the more well-to-do and high profile male members.⁹⁷ Looking at Quarterly Meeting as a whole, this situation seems to have been largely reflected elsewhere, and two trends in particular are suggested by the records. First, and perhaps not surprisingly, women who were ministers or Elders often took the leading share in the exercise of the discipline. Viewed as a group, these office-holders formed a tightly knit circle, composed mainly of individuals drawn from families in which, across generational and sexual lines, multiple members were active Quakers. Secondly, of the Friends who did not hold positions of official responsibility but who nevertheless participated in the business Meetings, many were either relatives of those who were ministers or Elders, or at least came from similar backgrounds.

The predominant place of ministers and Elders is most apparent at the level of Quarterly Meetings for discipline, as the records listing individuals who were appointed to carry out specific tasks illustrate. In December 1786, for example, the Meeting expressed concern at the failure of Thirsk, Guisborough and Richmond to send any delegates, and the ministers Elizabeth Hoyland, Elizabeth Priestman and Sarah Grubb, along with the Sheffield Elder Mary Fairbank, were appointed to draft a letter, 'to transmit to them the sense of this Meeting thereupon.'⁹⁸ Similarly in 1813, when the men's Meeting asked for help in visiting Yorkshire's Monthly and Preparative Meetings, the appointments made by the women were Sarah Hustler, Rachel Rowntree, Mabel Hipsley, Mary Birkbeck and Elizabeth Hoyland - all ministers - and two Balby Elders, Grace West and Susanna Clark.⁹⁹

Elders were Friends recognised for their personal integrity and faithfulness to Quaker beliefs and practices (sometimes coupled with seniority in age), who were appointed by their Monthly Meeting to take pastoral care of its members. Their lack of a specifically spiritual gift was compensated for by their devotion to the Society and active zeal to promote its internal welfare. In work with a pastoral dimension which arose from a tangible need for action within the Society, rather than from a personal revelation, they were expected to engage alongside ministers. The Women's Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting Fund, established in 1784 to rationalize the collection and distribution of donations from women's Monthly Meetings to poor female Friends, provides a good illustration of such cooperation. Its committee members for 1785-6 included Esther Tuke, Mary Proud and Mary Birkbeck, and the Elders Ann Hill,

⁹⁷Wright, *Friends in York*, p. 33.

⁹⁸'Minute Book of Women's Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1785-1845,' mf162, BIHR.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

Eleanor Grimshaw, Hannah Rowntree, Mary Fairbank, Agnes Thistlethwaite and Ann North, whilst Hannah Murray, another Elder, replaced Christiana Hustler as treasurer.¹⁰⁰ The close working relationship envisaged between ministers and Elders was demonstrated by the so-called 'select' disciplinary Meetings of Ministers and Elders held at Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly levels at which they monitored one another's conduct. Female Elders who showed especial dedication and diligence in discharging the duties of their office could enjoy esteem similar to that of their ministering sisters. The obituary of Mary Fairbank, who died at the age of eighty-eight in 1827, described how she had, 'cherished a lively interest in the welfare of her friends; amongst other duties watching over the ministry, and encouraging and counselling the young and inexperienced as a Mother in Israel.'¹⁰¹

Among the numerous grades of Meetings for discipline held by Friends, Meetings of Ministers and Elders were unique in that women and men met together. There seems to have been an understanding that, whilst in terms of the 'hands on' work which they did women Elders' chief responsibilities lay among other female Friends, the special qualities possessed by both pastoral and spiritual leaders in the Society transcended sexual difference. Nevertheless, the degree to which duties and responsibilities were shared equally between male and female members varied between Monthly Meetings. In Settle, for example, four

¹⁰⁰Two other women also sat on the original committee: Mary Snowden of Guisborough, who was recorded as an Elder in 1796, and Ann Hunter, about whom I can find no further information, although it is probable that she was the representative for Thirsk. Presumably, these women came forward as no 'weightier' Friends from the Meetings concerned offered to serve. See 'Women's Quarterly Meeting Treasurer's Cash Book, 1784-1869,' mf171, BIHR.

¹⁰¹Joseph Forster (ed.), *Piety Promoted, in brief biographical memoirs of some of the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers: Volume 11* (London, 1829), p. 419. The reference to 'watching over the ministry' reflects the important role which Elders had in assessing the divine origin or otherwise of unacknowledged members who spoke in meetings for worship and of deciding, in association with existing ministers, whether such members should be formally acknowledged as ministers, or asked to refrain from preaching. It should be stressed, however, that the pastoral authority of Elders did not compromise the special nature of the spiritual roles and responsibilities which ministers were permitted to fulfil, and that overstepping the bounds of accepted practice by Elders could create tensions within Meetings. In 1824, Ann Alexander requested and received a certificate from York Monthly Meeting to visit the West Country. Immediately afterwards, her husband William, an Elder, informed the Meeting of a 'concern' which he felt to visit families in Brighthouse Meeting. Although it was acknowledged to be highly unusual for an Elder to undertake such work, he was granted a certificate with which to travel. The following month, the Meeting received a letter of disapproval from its highly respected members, Hannah and Lindley Murray, who argued that, 'When such a minute as that which has been framed is given to an Elder, to pay a religious visit, not only to Meetings, but also to about Two Hundred Families of Friends, is it not very reasonable to suppose, that his religious communications may be considered, as in the line of Ministry? If not so, how are they to be considered? Our society knows of no *middle station* between a minister and an Elder, and can the Friends of our monthly meeting be warranted in thus *virtually* recommending an Elder to the exercises of ministerial offices when they have rarely if ever heard the Elder himself in that capacity?.' Letter attached in 'York Monthly Meeting: Certificates of Friends Travelling in the Ministry, 1686-1862,' mf185, BIHR. Lindley Murray clearly had a very high regard for the sanctity and integrity of the ministerial office. Although it was recognised as a lifelong position, he resigned his claim to be classed as a minister in 1802 when physical debility prevented him from actively fulfilling its duties.

male Elders were deputed to attend Quarterly Meeting in 1770 (it was assumed that ministers would attend if they were not otherwise engaged), but the following year Grace Slater and two men were selected. Brighouse did not begin appointing women as Quarterly Meeting representatives until 1784, when two men and two women were nominated.¹⁰² The most important office, that of Clerk, was almost exclusively occupied by a man throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Friends' disciplinary Meetings were in many respects similar to Meetings for worship, as those present were expected to seek divine inner guidance in order to answer questions under review. Their consensual system of transacting Society business meant that matters were never voted upon, but rather anyone wishing to contribute to a discussion was free to do so, and responsibility for discerning the tenor of the Meetings lay with the Clerk.¹⁰³ The recurrent appointment of men to the clerkship suggests that even within these mixed Meetings the idea prevailed that women's position in the exercise of discipline was subordinate. An important exception to this trend occurred in Settle Meeting where the signatures in the minute book indicate that Mary Birkbeck was appointed as Clerk, at least for the years 1808 and 1809, although there were men serving as both ministers and Elders at the time.¹⁰⁴

The number of women who were appointed to the Eldership within the Monthly Meetings of Yorkshire varied considerably. In Pickering, for example, there were only three women Elders during the whole period between 1791 and 1830, whilst twelve men held the same post. Settle, on the other hand, had a relative balance of the sexes in the late eighteenth century with nine men and eight women Elders holding office after 1785; but death, removal, and the transfer of Langstrothsdale Meeting to Richmond in 1785 meant that by 1810 it had just three men and one woman, and no Elders at all after 1825. In York and Brighouse the picture was healthier: between 1791 and 1830 York had nine men and five women Elders whilst Brighouse had thirteen men and twenty-three women. The fuller records available for the last two Meetings allow for closer exploration of the backgrounds of individuals who were

¹⁰²'Minute Book of Settle Monthly Meeting of Ministers and Elders, 1699-1814,' Carlton Hill MSS, D3; 'Minute Book of Brighouse Monthly Meeting of Ministers and Elder, 1777-1807,' Carlton Hill MSS, G2, BLUL.

¹⁰³When Sarah Grubb was selected to act as Clerk to the Women's Yearly Meeting in 1786 she tried to object, fearing she was unqualified for a post of such great responsibility, although she had been Clerk of the Quarterly Meeting for several years. She found inner strength to fulfil the role, however, 'begotten from that holy assistance, which I knew to be superior to every effort on my own without it. For though a degree of exertion is necessary, and the natural faculties of mind are called upon to service, yet I saw that they are no longer instrumental in helping forward the cause of Truth, than while they are actuated by divine love and life, and abide in the faith.' *Life and Labours of Sarah Grubb*, pp. 123-4.

¹⁰⁴'Minute Book of Settle Monthly Meeting of Ministers and Elders. 1699-1814' Carlton Hill MSS, D3, BLUL.

selected as Elders and indicate that their appointments did little to widen the base of leadership beyond the kinship and socio-economic groups which predominated in the ministry. Ministers and Elders were often closely linked personally as well as officially. Each of the five women Elders in York belonged to a family in which at least one other member held an official post in the Meeting.¹⁰⁵ Hannah Murray and Ann North were married to ministers; Mabel Tuke's mother, brother and sisters were ministers, her father was an Elder, and following her marriage and transfer to Hull she herself was recorded as a minister; Mary Backhouse's son James, and daughter-in-law, Deborah, were both ministers; Elizabeth Procter of Selby's brother, Thomas, was also an Elder. Strikingly too, of the Meeting's nine male Elders, five were husbands of ministers. In Brighouse, the lack of complete membership registers before 1813 prevents such comprehensive identification, but the sixteen women for whom some information on their backgrounds could be gleaned from a variety of sources reveal a similar pattern of family involvement to that found in York. Three of the women listed as Elders - Sarah Hustler, Mary Ellis, and Hannah Broadhead - were subsequently acknowledged as ministers. Sarah Hustler's mother was a minister and her brother, John, was appointed as an Elder several years after her death. Mary Ellis, Hannah Kaye, Phebe Houghton and Mary Crossland all served as Elders alongside their husbands. Ann North, who returned from York to Leeds in 1799, and Sarah Hird were both married to ministers. Two Elders, Sarah and Catherine Elam, emerged from successive generations of the same family, whilst the Jowitt family contributed at least five officials to the Meeting: Susanna and her daughter-in-law Rachel were Elders, Rachel's husband, Robert, was a minister, as were two of his cousins, Joseph Jowitt Nevins and Maria Arthington. Ann Maud's father-in-law had also been an Elder. With the exception of Hannah Murray and Ann Maud, all the female Elders in York and Brighouse for whom socio-economic status could be ascertained came from families engaged in middle-status occupations, especially in merchant, manufacturing or retailing activities. Official positions of authority in both Meetings were largely occupied by members drawn from a narrow circle of Friends amongst whom there was a clear family commitment to and identification with the values and welfare of the Society. In addition, the kinship ties which bound Elders both to one another and to ministers does not necessarily imply that those outside these networks were actively excluded, but it might indicate that a proven family record of service acted to recommend the integrity of other members to the Meeting.

Non-office holding women did join disciplinary committees and some were quite active in this service. Often, they had family connections to ministers and Elders, like Grace

¹⁰⁵See Appendix 3.

Jowitt and Sarah Arthington, both of Leeds, and Alice Birkbeck of Settle. Others with no apparent links to these kinship networks did, however, participate: Sybella Mallinson, the wife of a Huddersfield woolstapler, was a regular presence on Brighouse Meeting committees, as was Sophia Patchett, a hatter's wife from Leeds; Katherine Jepson, who along with her husband George superintended the Retreat hospital in York, frequently helped to conduct the business of the Meeting there; in Settle Meeting Dorothy Metcalfe, whose husband was a druggist, Bridget Tatham who was married to a linendraper, and Grace Wormall, a Lothersdale shopkeeper in partnership with her brother and sister, regularly served as inquisitors.

Whether or not they took on special disciplinary responsibilities, all members of the Society were encouraged and expected to attend their appointed business Meetings whenever possible. During the second half of the eighteenth century, as part of the effort to strengthen the Society's discipline, the practice became established of nominating several Friends to act as official delegates from Preparative to Monthly, from Monthly to Quarterly, and from Quarterly to Yearly Meetings. Delegates were responsible for transmitting their Meetings' answers to the Queries on members' conduct, and then for reporting back to their Meeting on the business conducted at the higher level. Women who were ministers or Elders were frequently chosen, or perhaps offered, to serve as representatives, but they were accompanied by women drawn from the rank and file membership. For example, between 1780 and 1830 eighty-seven women from York and fifty-five from Settle who were not office-holders were sent as representatives to Quarterly Meeting. Many of these were, again, from the Meetings' active families. The Tuke family's leadership in York Meeting was reflected in the high level of involvement by women who were not themselves ministers or Elders, such as younger family members and the wives of prominent Tuke men who married into the Meeting. What appears novel, however, was the substantial contribution to this work made by women from the various branches of the Cottingwith farming family of Webster. In Settle Meeting, the leading economic position of the Birkbeck family in the area, coupled with Mary Birkbeck's presence as the only female minister in the Meeting between 1801 and 1825, explains the regular appearance of other Birkbeck women as co-delegates with Mary in the lists of representatives. Particularly active too were the wives and daughters of the three branches of the Lothersdale wool-stapling family of Stansfield. Also registering a high level of involvement, however, were Sarah Binns, married to a weaver, Sarah Dixon, a farmer's wife, and most unusually Elizabeth Waring who was a servant. In their capacity as nominated delegates of their Meeting, therefore, the number of individual women who shared in the experience, at least in a minor way, of holding a formal position of responsibility and

contributing to the running of the Society was substantially increased. Moreover, this role was assumed by a small number of women from more humble and varied backgrounds than those who occupied positions as ministers and Elders.¹⁰⁶

Whatever roles and responsibilities Friends did or did not undertake in the spiritual or administrative guidance of the Society, all experienced the reality of living under the Quaker discipline. Its exacting rules laid out a blueprint for daily life, decreeing the most minute details of personal conduct such as what to wear, how to speak, and with whom to associate, and overseeing the domestic and business affairs of members. The practice of disowning those who transgressed the accepted codes of behaviour was designed both to protect the internal purity of the Society and to prevent disparagement of its reputation by the outside world.¹⁰⁷ The scrutiny which Friends were expected to bear from the other members of their Meeting into the most intimate details of their lives highlights the degree to which the notion of an internally open and visible community life transcended concepts of public and private space. Cases of real or supposed misconduct were a perennial problem for the Society. Transgressions covered a wide spectrum of behaviour including, for example, business failure, drunkenness, failure to attend Meetings for worship, marriage against Society rules, giving birth too or fathering a child out of wedlock, and involvement with arms, but all were seen to result from the same failure to keep close to the divine guide within. It is apparent from the minute books that those who were disowned often came from families which did not take a leading role in the Meeting, with many individuals only appearing in the records as a result of disciplinary action against them. This is not to suggest, however, that they were the unfortunate victims of a system riddled with nepotism. A more plausible explanation might be, that for those on the margins of the Society their Quakerism was not such a fundamental aspect of their personal identity. Their lives were probably less exclusively structured by membership of the Society, thereby loosening the hold which its strictures had over their conduct.

Although most of those who were found wanting in their observance of the Society's codes of behaviour appear to have come from families in which there was not a high level of involvement in the running of the Society, those who belonged to the Society's inner circle were neither uniformly circumspect in their conduct nor immune from the full weight of

¹⁰⁶Information on delegates compiled using 'Minute Books of Yorkshire Women's Quarterly Meeting,' 1746-1785, 1785-1820, 1820-1853, Clifford Street MSS, III 2.2, III 2.3, III 2.4, BLUL.

¹⁰⁷'Testimonies of denial,' as official notices of disownment were called, invariably charged the offender with bringing 'reproach' on the Society by her or his conduct.

disciplinary censure if they were found to have violated Society rules, although it does seem to have been the case that rather greater pains were taken in dealing with such cases, especially when there was a perceived chance of remedying the situation. In Pickering Meeting in 1812, for example, Elizabeth Rowntree, whose husband David was an Elder of the Meeting, was charged with persistent drunkenness. Numerous exertions were made over the next two years by women and men Friends to try secure her reformation, but she appeared intractable, and was finally disowned in 1814.¹⁰⁸ Men were no more able to circumvent the rules than women. In a late eighteenth-century incident in York Meeting Nathaniel Bell, a highly respected Elder, was judged to have taken insufficient action to prevent irregularities arising around his son's marriage, was removed from office whilst his son was disowned. The final action was only taken after the Bells had been given several opportunities to make amends and York Monthly Meeting had drafted in the help of Friends selected at Quarterly Meeting level.¹⁰⁹ Even more scandalous for the local community was the conduct of William Tuke junior of Thirsk, son of William and Esther of York. In 1819 it was revealed that four years earlier he had not only fathered a child by one of his servants, but had then bribed another servant into admitting paternity. He was disowned in 1820 after a lengthy investigation, again involving Quarterly Meeting help. There was evidently deep reluctance on the part of Thirsk Meeting to take this action, surely owing to Tuke's venerable parentage, although such a serious offence, which was initially brought to Friends' attention by the local Overseers of the Poor, could warrant no other punishment.¹¹⁰

Living under the Quaker discipline brought more than just scrutiny of one's daily life and conduct, however. The Society's concern to exist as a separate and self-supporting community meant that in positive ways its numerous networks provided practical assistance to its members. For example, in the sphere of trade and business there was a well-developed system operating between the Meetings for placing out young Friends as apprentices to other Quakers which operated on a nationwide scale. This practice obviously had most relevance

¹⁰⁸Minute Book of Pickering Monthly Meeting, 1804-1816,' DQR 8/5, HUL.

¹⁰⁹In 1867 the approved marriage between Nathaniel Bell junior and Judith Heron was repeatedly delayed for undisclosed personal reasons, and York Meeting expressed concern that Judith's residence in the Bell household might give rise to scandalous gossip. She appears to have been willing to move out as the Meeting suggested, but Bell junior refused to let her and was disowned, and his father removed from the Eldership for failing to keep his household in order. When the couple subsequently made a clandestine marriage in Clifford Meeting House, Judith was also disowned. 'Minutes of York Monthly Meeting, 1755-77,' pp. 143-154, Clifford Street MSS, D5, BLUL.

¹¹⁰Thirsk Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1810-1820,' pp. 247-279, and 'Thirsk Monthly Meeting Minutes 1820-27,' pp. 7-23, Clifford Street MSS, F7-F8, BLUL.

for Quaker boys, but girls too could benefit from it. In 1784, for example, the women of Owstwick Meeting took up the case of Rachel Anderson, a young woman who was deemed 'too weak to earn living in a strenuous manner.'¹¹¹ They secured the agreement of the Meeting to pay her apprenticeship fees so that she could train as a mantua-maker with Ann Tesseyman of York. Poor elderly Friends could be supported as pensioners of their Meeting, provided with cheap housing, a small allowance, and clothing.¹¹² At the other end of the chronological spectrum, the children of needy parents might be educated at the whole or partial expense of the Meeting, reflecting the importance which Friends attached to the early socialization of young members in the ways of Quakerism.

Women Friends and education: the York Friends' Girls' School

During the second half of the eighteenth century many Friends became increasingly interested in the important role which formal education might have to play in securing the future well-being of the Society.¹¹³ Concern that young Friends of both sexes should receive schooling, and that this should be given in a guarded, sectarian environment, was by no means novel. As early as 1690 the Epistle from London Yearly Meeting counselled, 'all Friends concerned (so far as they are able or may be capable), to provide schoolmasters and mistresses who are faithful Friends, to teach and instruct their children.'¹¹⁴ Repeatedly this advice was urged throughout the eighteenth century, but the schools which emerged proved inadequate to provide for the education of all young Friends.¹¹⁵ That concerted initiatives were finally taken in the later decades of the century in an effort to remedy this continuing deficiency can be understood as an aspect of the prevailing endeavour by leading Friends to tackle the problems of spiritual decay and unfaithfulness manifest in the Society as a body. The Yearly Epistle of 1780, for example, justified the Meeting's preoccupation with education with the observation that, 'the earlier young minds are instructed, and the better they are prepared to receive the

¹¹¹'Owstwick Monthly Meeting Minute Book, 1745/6-1787,' DDQR 20, EYARS.

¹¹² See 'Women's Quarterly Meeting Treasurer's Cash Book, 1784-1869,' mf171, BIHR.

¹¹³For an overview of the theory and practice of Friends education from the late eighteenth century onwards see Walvin, *The Quakers*, pp.91-104.

¹¹⁴*Epistles*, i, p. 48. As James Walvin emphasizes, a culture of literacy played a central role in the Society from its earliest years, in the form of Meeting records, diaries, tracts, letters and so on. *The Quakers*, pp. 45-8.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 94.

seed of the Kingdom, the more likely they will be to retain its virtue and profit thereby.’¹¹⁶

Ackworth School, opened in 1779 near Pontefract in Yorkshire and under the direction of London Yearly Meeting, was the most ambitious venture to date in the north of England, and its efforts were directed mainly at those who had been most excluded from existing provision, the children of Friends ‘not in affluent circumstances.’¹¹⁷ A smaller institution founded on the same principles as Ackworth, and born of the same reforming climate, already existed in Yorkshire. Gildersome School had been established by concerned Friends of Brighouse Meeting in 1772 and was supported by subscriptions and donations to educate the children of poor Friends, ‘in things tending to their present & future welfare.’¹¹⁸ Initially, only a schoolmaster was appointed, but when John Ellis married in 1774 it was agreed that his wife Mary should be employed as housekeeper, and it appears that her wages were paid independently of her husband’s.¹¹⁹ Two years later, it was decided that women should be given a proper share in the running of the school. A number of women were appointed with special responsibility for housekeeping matters and for ensuring that the girls were properly clothed and cared for, and they attended committee meetings alongside the men.¹²⁰ Ackworth too adopted the practice of selecting a committee of women Friends to act as visitors to the girls’ school. These practices can be seen as an early, if specifically sectarian, example of the institutional visiting which become a common feature of women’s widespread philanthropic

¹¹⁶*Epistles*, ii, p. 41.

¹¹⁷Walvin, *The Quakers*, pp. 94-9; For a contemporary account of the running of Ackworth school, especially the education given to girls, see *Life of Sarah Grubb*, pp. 233-244. The initial terms were eight guineas p.a., which, despite its intended constituency, put it beyond the means of poorer Friends. In order to allow children from particularly needy families to attend the school, Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting established a fund in 1791 to assist with the payment of their fees. See, ‘Minutes of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting,’ 28/6/1781, mf163, BIHR. Another Friends’ school under the direction of London Yearly Meeting already existed at Clerkenwell (founded 1702), but this was rather different from Ackworth. It had been established as a workhouse school, and whilst the children received basic schooling they spent most of each day in spinning and other industrial work. The school moved to Islington in 1786, but the dual system of labour and schoolwork continued until 1811 after which efforts were made to remodel it along the lines of Ackworth, although ‘its past history as a labour school put it on a somewhat lower footing.’ See W. A Campbell Stewart, *Quakers and Education: as seen through their schools in England* (London, 1953), pp. 62-3.

¹¹⁸‘Gildersome School Minute Book: Introduction,’ Carlton Hill MSS,P33, BLUL. The school appears to have taken both day and boarding pupils. Parents of the former could select what level of education their children received, with reading, writing and arithmetic available separately, whilst all the children appear to have been taught spinning and weaving. Doubtless in response to the demands of some of the more affluent and active patrons, it was also agreed that for a fee of £10 p.a. (£3 10s above the usual boarding rate) the child of any Friend could be sent to the school and exempted from manual work. John Jowitt, a prime mover in the school’s establishment, was the first to avail himself of this opportunity when he sent one of his sons there seven months after it opened. *Ibid.*, 12/1772.

¹¹⁹The minute book records that he was to be paid £20 p.a. and she £6 p.a..

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 4/1776.

work during the nineteenth century.¹²¹

Esther Tuke's proposal in 1784 to open a boarding school for girls in York was prompted in part by the developments taking place at Ackworth, in which William Tuke was a prime mover and where she herself served as a visitor. She aimed, however, to attract pupils from a different sector of the Society: girls for whom, because either they were too old or their parents were too affluent, Ackworth could not provide the requisite education.¹²² The School promised a guarded education, 'consistent with the Principles we profess,'¹²³ and it is evident that such training was intended to cultivate in young women the qualities which would encourage and enable them to take a leading part in the spiritual regeneration of the Society.

The operation of the York school, which survived until 1814, provides further evidence of the importance of personal, female-centred networks in furthering the aims of prominent women Friends. Esther Tuke was certainly the brains behind the project, but she was joined in advocating it by a formidable group composed of her kith and kin. Among the original proposers and proprietors of the school members of the Tuke-Hoyland connection were much in evidence: Esther Tuke, Sarah Grubb, Tabitha Middleton, and the sisters Elizabeth Hoyland and Sarah Swanwick.¹²⁴ They were accompanied by Sarah Priestman and another set of sisters, Martha Routh and Ann North, and all except Swanwick and North were ministers. Male relatives, especially husbands, did take an active part in the administration of the school alongside these women. William Tuke, Benjamin North and William Alexander successively occupied the position of co-superintendents in partnership with their wives, and after Hannah Murray became a proprietor in 1791 her husband, Lindley, made valuable intellectual and financial contributions.¹²⁵ Their involvement is hardly surprising, as the financial stakes which the female proprietors held in the school - initially £25 each - were in technically purchased with their husbands' money, and the men were anxious to monitor their investments. Such a

¹²¹Frank Prochaska notes that it is difficult to determine precisely when women began engaging in institutional visiting as part of a wider philanthropic programme, but suggests it was little known before the 1810s. Suggestively, he cites the Quaker feminist Priscilla Wakefield See as an early proponent of such work, in 1798. F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1980), p. 39.

¹²²'Minute Book of the York Friends' Girls' School, 1784-1815,' MOU 1/1, BIHR; H. Winifred Sturge and Theodora Clark, *The Mount School, York, 1785-1814, 1831-1891* (London, 1931), p. 3; Walvin, *The Quakers*, pp. 99-102.

¹²³*Ibid.*

¹²⁴See Appendix 4.

¹²⁵The most important of these were the assistance and training which he gave to the young women who were teachers at the school. He produced an *English Grammar* for use there, and at Sarah Grubb's school at Suir Island, which went on to bring him national celebrity, and donated the profits from its sale to the school. Stephen Allott, *Lindley Murray: Quaker grammarian of New York and old York* (York, 1991), especially pp. 36-8.

state of affairs did cause tensions, as an incident involving Martha Routh in 1790 indicates. Martha's husband, Richard, demanded that her share in the investment be returned to him, and this was done. Apparently aware of Martha's lack of complicity with the request, the committee drew up a minute stating that, 'we believe our Friend Martha Routh's concern for the welfare of the School will not be lessened, ... we are as desirous of her advice and assistance as if the money had not been withdrawn.' New rules were also introduced to prevent such unexpected financial shocks in the future, although for whatever reason Richard Routh changed his mind and returned the money the following quarter.¹²⁶ Husbands were necessarily involved, but this did not detract from the extent to which the school was a female project, in both design and execution. It was surely no coincidence either that its instigation followed hard on the heels of the official establishment of London Women's Yearly Meeting just five months earlier, or that four of the original proprietors (Tuke, Middleton, Hoyland and Routh) were part of the deputation which secured that establishment. Recognised in that context the school, like the Women's Yearly Meeting, appears as part of a comprehensive endeavour by a circle of eminent female ministers to secure and perpetuate a central role for women in their denomination. In no sense was either project intended to strike a blow for the 'rights of woman' in society as a whole, but within the confines of the Society of Friends it signalled an appreciation on the part of these women that they and their sisters had important rights and duties, the proper fulfilment of which was intimately connected with the welfare of Quakerism as a whole. Using typically figurative Biblical language, Esther Tuke made it clear that her vision for the School was as a seedbed of Quaker leaders when she wrote in 1790 to Sarah Grubb, who had by then moved to Ireland and with her husband's help established a school along similar lines to that at York on Suir Island:

[T]his little ark of cane which, like Pharoah's daughter I have drawn to me, and believe was a perfect child ... causes something of a desire to continue it a little longer, if I may be favoured with ability to promote its growth and permanency: that so according to the above comparison, it may, like Moses, be instrumental though but in a small degree, in bringing Israel out of Egypt, and as each of these our little seminaries have been pointed out by Divine Wisdom, who is secretly building his house, and hewing out his pillars, I have no doubt but they will remain under his care.¹²⁷

By aiming their school at girls from families in middling circumstances, its proprietors targeted the very group from which, as we have seen, women taking an active role in the

¹²⁶Minute Book of the York Friends' Girls' School,' 22/3/1790.

¹²⁷Quoted in Sturge and Clark, *The Mount School*, p. 19.

Society were most likely to emerge. At a more general level, however, the school aimed to produce women who would be faithful and diligent in the service of the Society whether they were called on to undertake special roles or whether their labours were to be confined to the narrower but no less important sphere of home and family.

In terms of curriculum, the York school taught a range of subjects in which the academic content seems to have been broadly similar to that which was common in the majority of girls' schools at the time. Pupils received instruction in 'useful Needlework and Knitting, the English Language, Writing and Arithmetic,' as well as geography and history. They were also instructed in the arts of housewifery, the last of which they learned through the practical duties of tidying their own rooms, waiting at table, and undertaking cooking or any other work which may be required in 'extraordinary cases.'¹²⁸ In terms of intellectual provision, York school probably offered in an institutionalised form the type of education which Friends of middling and higher status already aimed to provide for their daughters. Sympathetic contemporary observers were struck by the educated capacity of women Friends. Comparing English with American practice, Rebecca Jones remarked, 'Friends here seem more attentive to their daughters' education than in some parts of our country. They are mostly good pen-women, and read with propriety.'¹²⁹ Thomas Clarkson went further, stating that women Friends surpassed not only women from other denominations but also their own male co-religionists in intellectual attainments. Neither required to waste time on acquiring showy accomplishments like the former, nor whisked early from their books to learn the skills of trade or business like the latter, they had more time to devote to the cultivation of their understandings.¹³⁰ Tabitha Hoyland had been educated at home with her brothers in Sheffield where Latin was part of the curriculum, and her daughter Hannah Middleton attended York School, and later continued to study at home. Their experiences may not have been untypical of those of women from similar backgrounds within their denomination.¹³¹

Scholarly accomplishment was not, though, the primary branch of personal development with which the women who founded and administered York School were

¹²⁸Minute Book of the York Friends' Girls' School,; Sturge and Clarke, *The Mount School*, p. 5; *Life of Sarah Grubb*, p. 255. The academic subjects correspond to those commonly found on the curricula of the commercial girls' schools which mushroomed during the later eighteenth century. See Susan Skedd, 'Women teachers and the expansion of girls' schooling in England, 1760-1820,' in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: roles, representations and responsibilities* (London, 1997), pp. 101-25.

¹²⁹*Memorials of Rebecca Jones*, p. 82

¹³⁰Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism*, iii, pp. 284-287.

¹³¹[Maria Fox,] *Memoirs of Maria Fox* (London, 1846) pp. 13-17.

concerned. First and foremost, they hoped to provide an environment which would nurture individual spiritual growth and encourage subjection of the will to the Inner Light. Friends' insistence that personal inward experience was the ground of religious practice precluded any attempt to instill devotion to the Society through formulaic religious teaching at anything but a very general level. For example, any clothes brought by girls to the school which the authorities deemed 'inconsistent with the plainness which Truth leads into,' or books which 'give a disrelish for the purity of gospel truths,' were confiscated during their residence.¹³² Instead, the school sought to create an overall atmosphere which, in perhaps quite intangible ways, would nurture spiritual development. Primarily, this tone was to be set by the mistresses in the school. Of Esther Tuke it was observed that her religion 'governed her steps,' although it was seldom the topic of her conversation.¹³³ A similarly pious deportment was sought in the other teachers, whose vocation was viewed a religious calling, capable of being fulfilled only with inner help:

To educate children religiously requires a quietitude of mind, and sympathy in their guardians, with the state of the good seed in them, which will lead rightly to discriminate between good and evil. ... Here we see the necessity of true wisdom being renewed, and the insufficiency of that which is carnal ... If children are to be instructed in the groundwork of true religion, ought they not to discover in those set over them a lively example thereof?¹³⁴

Several women who worked as teachers were also ministers: for example Ann and Elizabeth Tuke and Ellen Abraham. Furthermore, the school was envisaged as a family community, and like other faithful Quaker families its members gathered together for worship. Travelling ministers, such as Susanna Boone, recorded the impressions made on them by the atmosphere at such time: 'I was much pleased with the order of the School & after tea they all met in the schoolroom and some of the great Girls read a chapter each & after there was a time of silence & my mind was engaged to speak though I felt very poor.'¹³⁵ Sarah Stephenson, who visited in 1794, recalled that at the school's evening meeting for worship, 'Esther [Tuke] appeared

¹³²*Life of Sarah Grubb*, pp.254-5.

¹³³Sturge and Clark, *The Mount School*, p.13.

¹³⁴Sarah Grubb, *Some Remarks on Christian Discipline as it Respects the Education of Youth* (London, 1795) pp. 8-9.

¹³⁵'Diaries of Susanna Boone,' 19/8/1787.

sweetly in testimony.¹³⁶ Some former pupils themselves become ministers, including Isabel Richardson of York and later Hull; Rachel Proud, who returned to Yorkshire from Essex in 1830; Mary Trickett of Sheffield; Ann Priestman of Malton; Esther Tuke's granddaughter, also Esther, and Tabitha Middleton's daughter, Hannah.¹³⁷ Samuel Tuke, who as a child for a short time attended lessons at the school, remembered that about three or four young women first came forward in ministry during their time there.¹³⁸

The York Friends' Girls' School was a striking example of the way in which ministering women Friends forged close networks in order to put their aims into practice. By this and by less formal means, from their respected position as the spiritual aristocracy of the Society which conferred on them a remarkable degree of authority and freedom, they made a determined effort to nurture and assist the spiritual development of others. In particular, they displayed a concern to unleash the leadership potential of other women. In carrying out their ministering duties they were further assisted by the supportive attitude of family and friends. Those in the ministry, along with Elders, formed a small and very closely-knit elite in the regional Quaker community, and, not surprisingly, were drawn overwhelmingly from middling-status families whose commitment to the Society was most entrenched. Non-office holding women did not enjoy the same kind of individual autonomy within the community as their ministering sisters, but there were nevertheless opportunities available for them to play a recognized part in the functioning of the Society. Moreover, the whole culture of the Society was orientated to accept as natural that women had the right to undertake formal responsibilities and wield denominational authority alongside men.

¹³⁶*Life of Sarah Stephenson*, p. 122.

¹³⁷Compiled from the 'List of Scholars' in Sturge and Clark, *The Mount School*.

¹³⁸Charles Tylor (ed.) *Samuel Tuke: his life, work and thoughts* (London, 1900) p. 8.

Chapter Four

Gentlewomen Dissenters: women in the Yorkshire Unitarian community.

Introduction

When members of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Unitarian elite theorized about the nature and position of women, their recurrent and distinctive point of emphasis was the equal capacity of women with men for both mental and moral improvement. A corollary of their rational, heterodox religious beliefs, this perspective on femininity served to affirm the Unitarian movement's progressive credentials. Through a study of the experiences of elite women in the Yorkshire Unitarian community, this chapter explores the extent to which, in practice, the denomination provided an environment where the exercise and development of women's rational capabilities was condoned and encouraged.

The first section of this chapter outlines the nature and structure of the Unitarian community in Yorkshire. It traces the establishment of Unitarianism as a denomination in the county, and looks at the socio-economic status of those who worshipped in its chapels. In the second section, the practices adopted by Unitarians for the formal education of their daughters are explored, paying attention both to variety and changes over time, and to how Unitarian girls' schooling compared to that developed among contemporary groups of similar social background. The two final sections deal with the place of women in their congregational and denominational communities. The first looks at the different ways in which Unitarian women were able to signal their support for Unitarianism. The denomination's organisational structure was male-dominated, echoing its heritage in orthodox Dissent, and where women surface in sources it is often as minor players. There is, nevertheless, evidence which indicates that in various important ways women contributed to their religious community, and in doing so made personal expressions of faith and commitment; Catharine Cappe of York provides the most striking, but certainly not an isolated, example. Finally, the participation of women in the cultural life of their community is considered. Unitarian institutions functioned as important sites where denominational values were articulated and affirmed, and it is apparent that, especially in relation to activities which pursued a loosely educational agenda, the presence of women was regarded not only as acceptable but even desirable.

The Unitarian community in Yorkshire

The Unitarian congregations which gathered in Yorkshire's Presbyterian chapels from the late eighteenth century onwards were not bound together by any formal ties, at least before 1815, and thereafter only in a very loose sense. Following a visit to the county that year by the Unitarian missionary, Richard Wright, a number of ministers, still styling themselves 'of the denomination commonly called Presbyterian,' agreed to follow Wright's suggestion and form a society for the distribution of Unitarian books, subsequently called the West Riding Religious Tract Society. Each of the affiliated chapels appointed a committee to coordinate the work locally, and annual meetings were held.¹ Yet despite the absence of an official organisational framework, it is still appropriate to speak of a regional Unitarian community. The congregational system of church government ensured the autonomy of each individual chapel, but the strong personal links of friendship and kinship which members of the clergy and laity forged between both themselves and one another bound them together across the county.

During Unitarianism's formative years in the 1770s, Yorkshire was one of its main intellectual seedbeds. This prominence was partly due to the presence in the county of a tight circle of Rational Dissenting ministers, drawn into friendship by their shared commitment to the pursuit of rational biblical criticism. The nucleus of this group was formed by Joseph Priestley at Mill Hill, Leeds; William Turner at Westgate, Wakefield; and Newcome Cappe at St Saviourgate, York, whilst others like John Graham at Northgate End, Halifax, participated on the fringes.² Priestley, Turner and Cappe all adopted Unitarian positions in this period, and their relationships with one another stimulated and refined their theological innovations. In 1772, for example, Priestley solicited Cappe's comments on the manuscript of his *Evidences of Christianity* and assured his friend, 'I will not publish without your

¹The original affiliated chapels were St Saviourgate, York; Mill Hill and Call Lane, Leeds; Westgate, Wakefield; Chapel Lane, Bradford; Northgate End, Halifax; South End, Elland, and Lydgate near Huddersfield. *Reports of the West Riding Religious Tract Society, 1816-28*, pp. 1-7; Walker and Goodchild, *Unitarianism in Yorkshire*, p. 18; see also *MR*, 10 (1815), p. 391.

²For biographical information, including notice of these friendships see: Joseph Priestley, *Memoirs of the Reverend Dr Joseph Priestley to the Year 1795, Written by Himself. With a continuation to the time of his decease by his son, Joseph Priestley*, (London, 1809), especially pp. 50-62; William Wood, *A Sermon Preached on the Occasion of the Death of the Reverend William Turner, to which are added Memoirs of Mr Turner's Life and Writings* (Newcastle, 1794), especially p. 16; Catharine Cappe, *Discourses Chiefly on Devotional Subjects by the late Reverend Newcome Cappe, to which are appended Memoirs of his Life* (York, 1805), pp. li-liv.

examination.³ Similarly, Priestley founded the *Theological Repository*, a periodical devoted to the publication of initiatives in biblical criticism, whilst he was at Leeds. It originated in his concern that some of Turner's novel Scriptural insights would be lost unless they were committed to print, and the Yorkshire circle formed the core of a nationwide group of Rational Dissenting ministers who supported the venture.⁴

The emergence of the Unitarian denomination was also indebted to the connections which Rational Dissenters made with Latitudinarian Anglicans, and Yorkshire networks were again crucial to this process. Priestley was acquainted with Archdeacon Francis Blackburne, the rector of Richmond and prominent Broad Churchman, who in his *Confessional* (1766) had argued for an end to subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles for prospective clergymen and university undergraduates, maintaining that they need only swear to their acceptance of the Bible as the word of God. Through Blackburne, he and Turner were introduced to the Archdeacon's stepson-in-law, Theophilus Lindsey, then vicar of Catterick, in the early 1770s.⁵ Although Lindsey was already experiencing grave conscientious misgivings about his position as a beneficed clergyman, his friendship with Priestley and Turner, and that which he subsequently formed with Cappe, almost certainly contributed to his decision, opposed by Blackburne, to leave the Church. They shared Unitarian beliefs, and when Lindsey resigned his living in 1773 and moved to London to open the first avowedly Unitarian chapel he received practical support from Turner⁶ and both Turner and Cappe publicly defended his secession in print.⁷

³John Towill Rutt (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley: with notes by the editor* (25 vols. in 26, London, 1817-32), i, p. 138.

⁴Priestley, *Memoirs*, pp. 52-3; Wood, *Memoir of Turner*, pp. 16-7; *TR*, 1 (1778, 1st published 1769), pp. iii-xvi. Besides Priestley, Turner and Cappe, the other signatories to the first edition were Samuel Clarke (Birmingham), Andrew Kippis (Westminster), Samuel Merivale (Exeter) and Thomas Scott (Ipswich). John Aikin (Warrington) and Richard Price (Newington Green) were also noted for the support which they had given to the publication.

⁵On the Latitudinarian role in the emergence of Unitarianism see John Gascoigne, 'Anglican Latitudinarianism, Rational Dissent and political radicalism in the late eighteenth century,' in Knud Haakonssen (ed), *Enlightenment and Religion: rational dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 219-240. Priestley had maintained a correspondence with Blackburne from the time when the latter's son was a student under his care at Warrington Academy. Priestley, *Memoirs*, p. 61; Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.* (London, 1812), pp. 33-4. See also Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-century Commonwealthman: studies in the transmission, development and circumstance of English liberal thought from the restoration of Charles II to the war with the thirteen colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 324-335.

⁶Belsham, *Memoir of Lindsey*, pp. 89-90; Catharine Cappe, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late Mrs Catharine Cappe, written by herself*, second ed. (London, 1823), p. 165.

⁷Belsham, *Memoir of Lindsey*, p. 92; Cappe, *Memoirs of Newcome Cappe*, pp. xxxviii-xli; *idem*, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 171-3. Priestley, Turner and Cappe all maintained lifelong correspondences with Lindsey and with each other, as their respective memoirs attest.

In subsequent decades, overlapping generations of Unitarian ministers maintained similar ties of personal and professional amity across the county. For instance, William Wood, Priestley's replacement at Leeds after 1772, was close to both Newcome Cappe and to Cappe's co-minister from 1792 and eventual successor, Charles Wellbeloved. Wellbeloved in turn made links with later ministers at Leeds, Thomas Jervis and Joseph Hutton.⁸ There appears to have been a tacit understanding that neighbouring ministers would offer friendship and support to newcomers to the area. Thomas Jervis, who occupied the pulpit at Mill Hill after Wood's death in 1808, initially took great umbrage at what he interpreted as a slight when Wellbeloved did not contact him soon after his arrival in Leeds.⁹ In 1811 Wellbeloved himself invoked the sense of a regional clerical community when he wrote to the out-going minister at Halifax, John Williams, 'I am very sorry that we shall lose you from this part of the country.'¹⁰ Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, their congregations felt the effects of these friendships too: ministers delivered sermons in each other's pulpits, sometimes conducting baptisms and burials whilst they were visiting, and on the death of one of their number, might preach funeral sermons and write biographical memoirs.

Yorkshire Unitarianism acquired an additional focus after 1803 when Manchester College moved from its home city to York, where it was conducted until 1840 under Wellbeloved's principalship. Manchester College perpetuated the Rational Dissenting ideal of liberal education and religious toleration being, for most of the early nineteenth century, the only higher education institution in the country which did not require students and staff to subscribe to any articles of faith.¹¹ Both divinity and lay students were accepted, and it professed to be non-denominational: Wellbeloved resolutely refused to teach doctrinal theology, although by his own admission this refusal did alienate some potential Unitarian supporters.¹² In practice, however, the York period saw the College become almost

⁸Cappe, *Memoirs of Cappe*, p. 41; Charles Wellbeloved, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Late Reverend William Wood, F.L.S., and Minister of the Protestant Dissenting Chapel at Mill Hill in Leeds*, (London, 1809) p. 33, pp. 83-8; John Kenrick, *A Biographical Memoir of the Late Reverend Charles Wellbeloved*, (London, 1860) p. 114-5.

⁹Letters between Charles Wellbeloved and Thomas Jervis, MS MNC MISC 1, HMC.

¹⁰Charles Wellbeloved to John Williams, 19/4/1811, in bundle of miscellaneous letters, NEC I (118), WYAS (Calderdale).

¹¹On the Rational Dissenting educational heritage and Manchester College see Barbara Smith (ed.), *Truth, Liberty, Religion: essays celebrating 200 years of Manchester College* (Oxford, 1986); H. McLachlan, *English Education Under the Test Acts* (Manchester, 1931); V. D. Davis, *History of Manchester College* (London, 1932).

¹²Wellbeloved wrote in 1809 to George William Wood, the College treasurer and son of William Wood of Leeds, 'I was gratified to learn from a Gentleman in London that some persons would not subscribe to us because they thought the Academy not strictly unitarian. I told him, I considered their censure the highest form of praise. I

exclusively the preserve of Unitarians, to an extent unprecedented in its earlier incarnations at Warrington and Manchester.¹³ As the scholar and College classics tutor, John Kenrick, observed, ‘With three Unitarian Tutors, supported only by Unitarians, receiving none but Unitarian students & sending out none but Unitarian preachers, we may disclaim as we please Unitarianism or Dissent.’¹⁴ On the occasions of the annual examinations and Trustees meetings in particular, ministers and leading laymen from the Unitarian heartlands of the North and Midlands converged on the city.¹⁵ William Turner’s son of the same name and minister at Hanover Square, Newcastle, served as Visitor to the institution from 1808 to 1853. He maintained particularly close ties to the Yorkshire network, cemented in 1810 when his son, again William Turner, was appointed mathematics tutor.¹⁶

The fact that a sense of community can be identified among the institutions of Rational Dissent should not, however, obscure the diversity, fluidity, even ambiguity, which characterised the specific beliefs of those who gathered in them; commitment to religious freedom allowed for a wide spectrum of comprehension. Call Lane chapel in Leeds, for example, was affiliated to the West Riding Tract Society and had especially close links with the ministers and congregation at Mill Hill.¹⁷ It was distinctive, however, in that it was an Independent chapel and Arianism rather than Unitarianism proper was its prevailing theological perspective. Within individual chapels too there could be diversity of views, and the adoption of Unitarianism by the settled minister did not necessarily mean that his congregation shared such beliefs. As John Seed has shown, in many Presbyterian chapels during the eighteenth century the traditionally authoritative moral and doctrinal position which

do not, I will not, teach Unitarianism or any *ism* but *Christianism*.’ MS Wood 1, fols. 84-5, HMC.

¹³See David L. Wykes, ‘Sons and subscribers: lay support and the College,’ in Smith (ed.), *Truth, Liberty and Religion*, pp. 33-69.

¹⁴Kenrick did not share Wellbeloved’s views against allying the College more explicitly with Unitarianism, arguing that it made their activities suspect in the eyes of both their friends and enemies. John Kenrick to George William Wood, 8/8/1814, MS Wood 3, fols. 25-6, HMC.

¹⁵See list of attenders at the Trustees Meeting, 1821 in ‘Manchester College York Minute Book, August 1819-June 1824,’ p. 68, MS MNC MISC 68, HMC. See also Davis, *History of Manchester College*, pp. 72-3.

¹⁶See, for example, Edward Hughes (ed.), ‘The diaries and correspondence of James Losh,’ *Publications of the Surtees Society* 171 (1956), pp. 4-5, which describes the visits of College students and Charles Wellbeloved to Newcastle to preach at Hanover Square.

¹⁷Seed, ‘Theologies of power,’ p. 125. For examples of the close relationships between ministers at Mill Hill and Call Lane, and of the way in which some lay families worshipped at both chapels, see: Joseph Henry Hutton (ed.), *Personal Duties and Social Relations: a volume of discourses on Christian character and conduct by the late Joseph Hutton, LL.D., with a memoir* (London, 1861), pp. xli-xlii; C. A. Lupton, *The Lupton Family in Leeds* (privately printed, Ripon, n.d.), p. 28.

the minister occupied over his flock was breaking down. Especially in expanding commercial and industrial areas, increased wealth and social status among leading lay congregants brought them into greater contact with the secular world and polite society, rupturing their traditional allegiance to the Puritan ascetic ideal. They embraced Rational Dissent as a corollary of this more relaxed and worldly stance, and would not tolerate their minister exercising his conventional priestly functions of moral guardianship and indoctrination.¹⁸ Thus, whilst ministers might hold strongly heterodox convictions themselves and publish controversial theological treatises, it was understood that in terms of their pastoral role there should be a broad accommodation of views within the congregational community. At York not all members of St Saviourgate chapel shared Cappe's Unitarianism, but they remained worshippers there as his preaching was exclusively practical and devotional. In contrast, Wellbeloved was more openly heterodox on points of doctrine than his predecessor, as a result of which there were a number of secessions after he became sole minister.¹⁹ When Richard Wright preached at Bowl Alley Lane chapel, Hull, in 1805 during a missionary tour of Yorkshire, one of the congregation told him that he was the first person openly to proclaim Unitarianism from the pulpit there. Wright recorded his surprise at the news, 'knowing that the ministers who had officiated there for many years had been Unitarians.'²⁰ On the other hand, as Unitarianism became more organised and established during the nineteenth century lay members could find themselves professing a more radical theology than their minister, and frustrated by his inability or unwillingness to provide clearer doctrinal guidance. At Upper Chapel, Sheffield, in 1828 a section of the congregation seceded in order to hold services with a more explicitly Unitarian content, because the chapel's Arian minister of twenty-three years, Nathaniel Philipps, persisted in calling himself Presbyterian and retained the non-doctrinal preaching style typical of Rational Dissent.²¹ If the old bonds of authority and deference between minister and flock were broken, however, it is clear that, as we shall see in the course of this chapter, links were being built in a variety of other ways.

Unitarianism in Yorkshire has been characterised as a religion of the educated, the self-

¹⁸Seed, 'Unitarianism and the formation of liberal culture,' pp. 93-109; *idem*, 'Gentlemen Dissenters,' pp. 310-2.

¹⁹Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, p. 45.

²⁰Richard Wright, *A Review of the Life and Missionary Labours of Richard Wright, Written by Himself*, (London, 1924), pp. 81-2.

²¹The majority of the congregation which remained at Upper Chapel also seem to have adopted a Unitarian position by this time, and changed new sectarian identity of the congregation was openly acknowledged by Philipps successor, Bartholomew Feeling Stannous, in 1838. J. E Manning, *A History of Upper Chapel, Sheffield*, (Sheffield, 1900), p. 74, p. 99; Bell, *Peeps into the Past*, pp. 111, 292.

assured and, if not always the opulent, in many cases the affluent. Visiting the county in the early nineteenth century, Richard Wright was struck by the ‘large and genteel congregations’ gathered there, especially in the West Riding.²² In 1834, a historian of the region observed, ‘The Unitarians are not numerous, but in point of circumstances and station, they are a highly respectable body in the district.’²³ It is impossible to reconstruct a complete picture of the social and economic profile of Unitarianism’s constituency because chapels did not keep comprehensive membership records; registers of baptisms, burials and pew rentals, however, cross-referenced with other sources do provide enough information to obtain a clear impression. Looking comparatively at the three chapels of Mill Hill, Leeds; Northgate End, Halifax, and St Saviourgate, York, it is apparent that, whilst Unitarian congregations had several features in common, they did not present a uniform aspect across the county. In addition, although the tenor of an individual congregation was undoubtedly set by its social and economic elite, each chapel attracted members from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, including some from the skilled working classes.

Mill Hill chapel was, as John Seed has observed, a thriving congregation throughout the period under discussion.²⁴ It boasted an array of elite members. Some were drawn from among the various branches of the town’s leading families of textile merchants, such as the Oateses, the Stansfelds, the Luptons, the Bischoffs, the Hebblethwaites and the Lees. Josiah Marshall too was a woollen merchant, and his son John became one of the West Riding’s most substantial manufacturers and a member of the reformed Parliament. Professional men featured strongly too: Benjamin Hird and Maurice Logan were physicians; James Musgrave a banker; Charles Coupland, William Sykes and T. W. Tottie solicitors; and numerous men dignified themselves by the ambiguous but self-confident title of ‘gentleman,’ including William Hargrave, Joseph Henry Oates, Thomas Benyon and John Darnton. To this social and economic weight were added political and intellectual muscle. When Edward Baines, Congregationalist reformer, politician and newspaper editor, arrived in Leeds around the turn of the century, he found the cream of the town’s progressive intelligentsia gathered at Mill Hill, and his brother-in-law and deputy editor, John Talbot, belonged to the congregation.²⁵

²²Wright, *Life and Missionary Labours*, p. 214.

²³Edward Parsons, *The Civil, Ecclesiastical, Literary, Commercial and Miscellaneous History of Leeds, Halifax, Huddersfield, Bradford, Wakefield, Dewsbury, Otley and the Manufacturing District of Yorkshire* (2 vols., Leeds, 1834), ii, p.22.

²⁴Seed, ‘Theologies of power,’ pp. 125-6.

²⁵Edward Baines, *Life of Edward Baines: late M.P. for the borough of Leeds* (London, 1851), pp. 55-7.

It drew members too from among the middling classes of retail and wholesale traders, semi-professionals, manufacturers, and those connected with the woollen textile industry further down the chain from the opulent merchant classes, such as William Fretwell, tea-dealer and grocer; David Dunderdale and Anthony Hopton, shopkeepers; Asher Graham, hay-dealer; William Read, book-keeper; David Metcalf and Samuel Musgrave, woollen and cloth dyers. But Mill Hill attracted a more humble class of member too. When Joseph Priestley arrived there in 1767, he found, 'a liberal, friendly and harmonious congregation,' including a significant number of poorer listeners who combined their Unitarian worship with attendance at Methodist services.²⁶ In the early nineteenth century, whilst the chapel did not attract the very poor, it retained its appeal for some of the skilled working classes, numbering builders, joiners, tailors, engravers and plasterers, for example, among its congregants.²⁷

Despite this degree of social comprehension, however, the chapel was dominated culturally by its intellectual and economic elites. In his memoir of William Wood, Charles Wellbeloved acknowledged the influence wielded by this group: Wood married Louisa Ann Oates, daughter of George Oates, a local merchant of considerable means, and, 'it was a matter of no little importance to his comfort, that he became by this means united in closer ties to a considerable part of his congregation.'²⁸ Indeed, marriage provided an important route by which ministers were able to secure their position within the congregational elite. Charles Wicksteed, who served as minister at Mill Hill between 1818 and 1834, married Jane Lupton, daughter of Arthur, another Leeds woollen merchant.²⁹

Northgate End shared many of Mill Hill's characteristics, although whereas the latter remained in a 'flourishing state,'³⁰ Dorothy Wordsworth, an erstwhile member of the Halifax congregation, expressed the fear in 1795 that it was in serious decline.³¹ The chapel does appear to have suffered a drop in members from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century

²⁶Priestley, *Memoirs of Priestley*, pp. 51-4.

²⁷Occupational data compiled using: 'Mill Hill Chapel Register of Baptisms and Burials, 1773-1836,' RG4/3181, FRO; George Oates, 'MS notes and plan of graves, Mill Hill chapel,' (1847), Mill Hill 53, WYAS (Leeds); 'Mill Hill Chapel Pew Rent Book, 1829-1848,' Mill Hill 18, WYAS (Leeds); William White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the West Riding of Yorkshire* (2 vols., Sheffield, 1837), i, pp. 536-670.

²⁸Wellbeloved, *Memoir of Wood*, p. 20.

²⁹Lupton, *The Lupton Family of Leeds*, p. 39; William L. Schroeder, *Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, 1674-1924* (Hull, 1924), p. 59.

³⁰John Thompson, quoted in Seed, 'Theologies of power,' p. 125.

³¹Ernest de Selincourt, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Volume 1: the early years, 1787-1805*, (Oxford, 1967), p. 143.

but its social profile continued to embrace members from the professional elites to the skilled working classes. It included, for example: solicitors John Lonsdale and James Stansfeld; physicians Richard Moulson and John Thompson; the merchant and banking family of Briggs; woollen merchants John and William Pollard, William Threlkeld and William Kershaw; wool-stapler, William Huntriss; schoolmaster, James Tiffany; hairdresser, Samuel Stancliffe; bookseller, John Booth; Thomas and William Smith, card-makers; Abel and Benjamin Wadsworth, tailors; Eli Gledhill, house-painter; and a strikingly high number of shoe- and patten-makers.³² Looking at the two chapels together, it is apparent that marriages between members of the lay elite played a significant part in binding together the Unitarian community across the county. For example, William and Ann Pollard's sixth daughter, Jane married John Marshall of Leeds,³³ and two children of David Stansfeld, a Leeds woollen merchant, and his wife, Sarah, married into the upper echelons of Halifax Unitarian society. James set up in legal practice in the town and married Emma Ralph, the daughter of a former minister at Northgate End, whilst his oldest brother, Thomas Wolrich, merchant, married Ann, daughter of the merchant, banker and magistrate, Rawdon Briggs.³⁴

York's Unitarian congregation was rather different from its West Riding neighbours, where the expansion of the woollen industry played an important part in producing a class of lay leaders. Historically, and reflecting its origins as a foundation of Sir John and Lady Hewley in the late seventeenth century, St Saviourgate drew a narrow but important tier of membership from among county gentry families. According to the chapel's historian, John Kenrick, the link between many of this group and Rational Dissent was sundered in the wake of the French Revolution, and especially following the appointment of the openly radical Wellbeloved.³⁵ The chapel retained an upper strata of professionals, however, including the banking brothers with gentry connections, Gilbert and Joshua Crompton; William Frederick Rawden and Robert Cappe, physicians; John Hotham, barrister; Samuel Cowling, solicitor and City of York coroner, and his son John, also a solicitor. Alongside these, the congregation

³²Occupational data compiled using: 'Northgate End Register of Baptisms and Burials,' mf. 3167; 'Memorial inscriptions of tablets, brasses and windows in Northgate End Chapel, Halifax,' NEC 154; 'Northgate End Chapel Pew Rents, 1794-1819,' NEC 1C 30; 'Northgate End Chapel Pew Rents, 1819-1872,' NEC 1C 29, all in WYAS (Calderdale); White, *History, Directory and Gazetteer*, i, pp. 405-429.

³³de Selincourt, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 1.

³⁴John Stansfeld, *History of the Family of Stansfeld of Stansfield in the Parish of Halifax and its Numerous Branches* (Leeds, 1885), pp. 182, 236.

³⁵John Kenrick, *Memorials of the Presbyterian Chapel, St Saviourgate, York, from the Origins of Nonconformity to the Present Time* (York, 1869); *idem*, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, p. 44.

numbered, among others, a printer, several merchants, a joiner, shoemakers and grocers.³⁶ St Saviourgate's congregation was tiny, and although it gained something of a shot in the arm as the chapel of Manchester College in the early nineteenth century, this only really provided it with a transient and changing boost in numbers, not with a new intake which could make a long-term contribution to the life of the chapel.

It should be acknowledged here that, besides evolving in these established centres of Rational Dissent, Unitarianism appeared in another, and quite different, form in Yorkshire during the early nineteenth century. A number of popular Unitarian congregations, whose memberships were drawn overwhelmingly from among the labouring poor, emerged in several parts of the county.³⁷ They have been excluded from this study, as they were a culturally quite distinct expression of Unitarianism from that which was found in the county's Presbyterian chapels including, for example, members who were wholly illiterate.

The education of Unitarian girls

Unitarian writers urged, as we have seen, that girls as well as boys should receive an intellectually stimulating education as a preparation for life. It is impossible to determine the extent to which this advice was reflected in the schooling practices which were adopted by those belonging to Yorkshire's Unitarian community in the education of their daughters. The records simply do not exist which would enable the construction of anything approaching a complete picture of the educational experiences of Unitarian girls, either across the county or over time. Sources which offer accounts of what might be termed 'formal' schooling are scarce and often contain minimal information on curricula, teacher and pupil expectations and so on. Nevertheless, handled with a cautious eye to their limitations, these materials can shed light on the educational practices employed by certain sections of the Unitarian community. They relate exclusively to the ways in which families representing the influential and the affluent educated their daughters and so cannot be interpreted to reveal any more than that; thus the activities of the substantial numbers of Unitarian adherents lower down the socio-

³⁶Occupational data compiled using: 'St Saviourgate Registers of Baptisms, 1724-1836,' and 'St Saviourgate Register of Burials, 1794-1836,' RG4/3780, FRO; Colton Trust Papers, UCSS 4/6, BIHR; White, *History, Directory and Gazetteer*, II, pp. 723-756.

³⁷See David Eaton, *Scripture the Only Guide to Religious Truth: a narrative of the proceedings of the society of Baptists in York*, second ed. (London, 1809); Wright, *Life and Missionary Labours*, pp. 79-81, 185-97 and 320-2.

economic ladder remain obscured from view. At the same time, if the findings about the education of girls from Yorkshire's Unitarian elites are placed in the wider context of what can be uncovered about practices from elsewhere in the country it appears that leading Unitarian families acted upon a general consensus.

As Ruth Watts has indicated, there were, broadly speaking, two ways in which Unitarian girls received a formal programme of education: at school and/or at home. She suggests that, determined to secure a better education for both male and female offspring than was available through existing middle-class provision, they developed various systems among themselves for providing an academic curriculum which was, relatively speaking at least, both academically rigorous and designed to have practical application in later life.³⁸ During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there is evidence that both types of education - domestic and school based - were employed by Yorkshire Unitarians.

A number of schools were conducted by individuals in Yorkshire and elsewhere offering day and boarding facilities for girls which, if not exclusively sectarian, had Unitarian staff and drew their pupils chiefly from among their co-religionists. At Halifax during the 1780s and 1790s Martha and Hannah Mellin, two spinster sisters belonging to Northgate End chapel, ran a 'girls' academy,' of which the former was headmistress. The venture evidently prospered, as during the late 1780s it moved to more extensive premises in order to accommodate boarders. Although no records survive for the school, its main catchment was probably among local Unitarians of comfortable means. Dorothy Wordsworth lived in Halifax for ten years from the age of six in 1777, where she was cared for by her late mother's cousin, Elizabeth Threlkeld, daughter of the former minister of Northgate End, Samuel Threlkeld. Dorothy attended the chapel and her closest friend, Jane Pollard, was the sixth daughter of local wool merchant and leading light of the congregation, William Pollard. At thirteen years old Dorothy was sent as a day pupil to the Mellins' school where, it appears, the emphasis was not on polite accomplishments but on solid intellectual development: 'before she was sixteen her small library contained the works of Shakespeare, Milton and Fielding, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, probably in Pope's translation, *Gil Blas*, *The Spectator* and Goldsmith.'³⁹ It is likely that encouragement in literary pursuits also derived from her assimilation into the upper layers of local Unitarian society.

³⁸Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London, 1998), especially pp. 53-6, 121-136.

³⁹Information on the school is drawn from accounts of the life of Dorothy Wordsworth. See Ernest de Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth: a biography*, (Oxford, 1933), pp. 5-10; *idem* (ed.), *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, i, especially p. 42 note.

Susan Skedd has shown that from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards there was a rapid expansion in the commercial provision and consumption of school-based education for girls which opened up to women a respectable form of business in school-keeping.⁴⁰ The Mellin sisters offer an instance of such female enterprise, but not until about the second quarter of the nineteenth century does it appear that members of the Unitarian elite patronised these types of establishment in significant numbers. Thereafter, there are references in the Yorkshire sources to several girls' boarding schools which clearly had a high reputation among Unitarian parents. Indeed, women hoping to attract girls from the higher echelons of Unitarianism to their schools relied heavily on the prestige attached to their family name. During the 1830s and 1840s several girls from the Lupton family of Leeds and its satellites attended the school run in Liverpool by Rachel Martineau, sister to the rising light in the Unitarian ministry, James Martineau, and the author, Harriet.⁴¹ A long-running school of this kind was that conducted by Catherine Turner in Nottingham between 1822 and 1836. In 1820 she had married Henry, younger son of the highly esteemed William Turner of Newcastle and Unitarian minister at Nottingham, but was widowed within two years.⁴² Her school was hailed as a pioneering venture in girls' education, and its pupils included the daughters of the Halifax solicitor and future county judge, James Stansfeld: members of the Heywood family which had branches in Leeds, Wakefield and Liverpool, and Frances Elizabeth Greenhow, the daughter of a Newcastle physician who later as Frances Lupton of Leeds was a leading promoter of women's higher education.⁴³ No records of the curriculum survive, but reflecting in 1846 on the schooling which she had sought to provide during her career, Catharine Turner acknowledged that her approach had been pioneering, 'I had taken the lead in what was now become a spirit more generally accepted.'⁴⁴

Prior to the 1820s, girls' schools under female headship do not appear to have played a significant part in the education of girls from leading Unitarian families. This pattern of behaviour might be explained in part as typical of families in relatively high social and

⁴⁰Susan Skedd, 'Women teachers and the expansion of girls' schooling in England, 1760-1820,' in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-century England: roles representations and responsibilities*, (Harlow, 1997), pp. 101-125.

⁴¹Lupton, *The Lupton Family*, p. 51, 64.

⁴²*Inquirer*, (1896), pp. 279, 297.

⁴³See the correspondence between Emma Stansfeld and her daughters Maria and Mary, and that between her daughter Sarah and Catherine Turner in Dixon and Stansfeld Papers Box 1, no. 3, WYAS (Leeds).

⁴⁴Catherine Turner to Sarah Stansfeld, 16/8/1846, Dixon and Stansfeld Papers, Box 1, no. 3, WYAS (Leeds).

economic positions, whose menfolk were professionals, merchants and manufacturers. In her exploration of the lives of Georgian women from gentry, professional and commercial networks in Lancashire and West Yorkshire, Amanda Vickery found that only from the early nineteenth century onwards is there evidence of girls being sent out to school to receive their education.⁴⁵ Status alone, however, does not provide an adequate explanation. Focussing attention on the ways in which parents in the upper ranks of Unitarianism chose to educate their daughters in the half-century after 1770 discloses practices which suggest the pursuit of a distinctive sectarian agenda.

Perhaps the most striking theme to emerge from accounts of elite educational practice, at least once girls reached adolescence, is the dominant role which men played in the superintendence of their intellectual development. Some girls attended schools run by Unitarian ministers, where they were taught in a co-educational setting.⁴⁶ The chapel on the estate at Norton in north Derbyshire belonging to the Shores of Sheffield supported a settled minister who also acted as schoolmaster to members of the neighbouring Unitarian elite, and throughout the early nineteenth century the school provided education for girls. Robert Aspland, later editor of the *Monthly Repository* and a prime mover in the Unitarian movement, held the post of minister and schoolmaster briefly in 1805, and his pupils included Maria Eliza Shore, eldest daughter of the substantial Sheffield banker Samuel Shore IV and his wife Harriet, who occupied Norton Hall.⁴⁷ Aspland's replacement, Henry Hunt Piper, initially gave the school over exclusively to the education of girls, but despite the favourable opinions which some of his friends entertained about the quality of education offered there he failed to attract sufficient pupils to make the venture economically viable. Consequently he turned his attention to boys' schooling, although girls from the Shore family, including Maria Eliza's sisters, Emily and Lydia, continued to be educated there. Information on the subjects taught is thin, but classics almost certainly featured as part of the girls' curriculum; as Robert Aspland's remark that Maria Eliza, 'was acquainted with the original languages of the

⁴⁵Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: women's lives in Georgian England*, (London, 1998), pp. 343-4.

⁴⁶Opening a school was the frequent financial resort of Unitarian ministers seeking to augment the often meagre salaries of their profession. Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians*, pp. 53-6, 121-136.

⁴⁷Maria Eliza was about ten or eleven years old at the time of Aspland's incumbency, and he recalled that on one occasion, when bored with the rest of the company, he, 'became interested in the intelligent talk of my female scholar.' Robert Brook Aspland, *Memoir of the Life, Works and Correspondence of the Reverend Robert Aspland of Hackney* (London, 1850), p. 168 note. For the history and genealogy of the Shore family and their connections with Norton see Lady Stephen, 'The Shores of Sheffield and the Offleys of Norton Hall,' *Transactions of the Hunterian Archaeological Society*, 5 (1943), pp. 1-17.

Scriptures,' suggests.⁴⁸

In the cases of the Shore sisters there were clearly special family circumstances which allowed them admission to their respective schools. The experiences of the latter do point, however, to an important theme in accounts of Unitarian girls' education: the crucial role played by fathers. For three years around the turn of the century William Wood of Leeds devised a rigorous course of lessons for his daughter, Louisa Ann, and a small circle of her local female contemporaries. An unusually full account of the curriculum and aims of the school was provided by Charles Wellbeloved in his memoir of Wood. The pupils studied, 'History, Geography, Natural Philosophy, Grammar, the Belles Lettres, Natural History, the Human Mind, Moral Philosophy and the Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion,'⁴⁹ a curriculum which resembled that offered by Unitarians in their boys' schools but shorn of classics and mathematics.⁵⁰ Wood provided a systematic and academic course of education which lasted for three years. Dissatisfied with the quality of many standard text books in circulation, he compiled his own teaching materials from a selection of those authors which he considered the most accurate and his own researches. He employed a range of teaching techniques alongside book learning. In natural history, for example, a subject in which Wood was a nationally-renowned expert, practical experiments and demonstrations formed part of the syllabus.⁵¹ Certain that girls possessed, 'minds capable of the greatest comprehension,' it was a primary concern of Wood's that his pupils, 'learned to read with caution, to place no implicit reliance upon any author, however high his reputation, but to examine and judge for themselves.'⁵²

When Unitarian parents opted to place their daughters' tuition under male care, whether from within the family or from without, they confirmed their intention to secure for them an

⁴⁸Aspland, *Memoir of Aspland*, p. 168 note. Thomas Asline Ward, a Sheffield cutler and merchant and friend of Piper, believed that it was lack of publicity which led to the failure of his girls' school: 'Really, he has not the heart or art to puff. He is too modest to state what I think is the fact, that his 50 guineas school is as good as most at double the price, and as cheap as most at half, because of the extras.' Bell (ed.), *Peeps into the Past*, p. 172. See also Stephen, 'The Shores of Sheffield,' p. 10.

⁴⁹Wellbeloved, *Memoir of Wood*, pp. 68-83.

⁵⁰Watts, *Gender Power and the Unitarians*, pp. 53-4.

⁵¹Wellbeloved, *Memoir of Wood*, pp. 68-83.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 69-72. Louisa Ann was born in 1786, but I have been unable to trace the identity of any of her fellow pupils. When her nephew and Wood's grandson, William Rayner Wood, was a student at Manchester College in 1829 he wrote to his father to say that he had met a Mrs Taylor of York who was 'a pupil of Grandpapa's,' but as he gives no mention of her unmarried name.

explicitly intellectual education.⁵³ Especially in the eighteenth century, the generality of girls' schools run by women offered a basic curriculum of reading and needlework, but concentrated primarily on instilling proficiency in the 'elegant accomplishments' - French, drawing, music and dancing. Schoolmistresses often had to engage the assistance of specialist tutors; those brought in to give lessons in the polite accomplishments were often male, and this was invariably the case if writing or arithmetic were the subjects being taught.⁵⁴ Expertise in the sphere of teaching was thus overall a male preserve, but the educational demands of leading Unitarians underlined the inadequacy of women's educative skills. Their aim was to provide girls with at least the elements of a liberal education, and that could be obtained only from individuals who had undergone such schooling themselves, in other words, men. William Wood's determination to educate Louisa Ann was based upon his aversion to the way in which conventional girls' schooling caused, 'the finest talents' to be 'too generally wasted upon mere personal accomplishments.'⁵⁵ The gradual willingness which parents demonstrated as the nineteenth century progressed to put the teaching of their daughters into the hands of women professionals like Rachel Martineau and Catherine Turner indicates an acknowledgement that, within their own denomination at least, women had finally been educated to a sufficiently high intellectual standard to enable them to take responsibility for schooling the next generation.

The formal role and function of women in congregational life

John Seed suggests that the unusual degree to which Unitarians encouraged female education had little reflection in other areas of life, and often simply served as 'a reinforcement of the boundary between public/male and private/female spheres.' In chapel life, he argues, women served only as symbols of patriarchal power for their male relations.⁵⁶ Women were not, it is true, permitted to assume any official role in the Unitarian hierarchy. They could neither train

⁵³Marjorie Reeves' study of the educational experiences of women belonging to a network of rational dissenting Baptist families in the south of England also stresses the importance of men's contribution to women's intellectual development in the eighteenth century, although in a less formal way: 'to a large extent the real education of intellectual young women was fostered by their social environment - bookish fathers who were in touch with theologians and writers of various types, or literary men who became patrons of talented girls.' *Pursuing the Muse: female education and nonconformist culture, 1700-1900* (London, 1997), p. 19.

⁵⁴Skedd, 'Women teachers and the expansion of girls' schooling,' pp. 120-1.

⁵⁵Wellbeloved, *Memoir of Wood*, p. 69.

⁵⁶Seed, 'Theologies of power,' p. 129.

and serve as ministers nor act as institutional officers and trustees. Yet the pew rent registers of both Mill Hill and Northgate End suggest that women were a significant independent presence in their local community.⁵⁷ Exclusion from the clerical and lay positions of authority which were open to their male co-religionists did not debar all women either from explicitly signalling their commitment to Unitarianism or from working for its promotion.⁵⁸ Evidence from Yorkshire indicates that the ways in which female adherents made such shows of support, and the extent to which they were able to do so, varied considerably. The random, personal variables of financial and family circumstances played the most significant part in determining the opportunities available to interested women independently to demonstrate their sectarian allegiance. For most, participation in the business of the Unitarian community was linked specifically to their chapel membership, so the practices adopted within individual congregations served to determine the character of their involvement. One exceptional woman who belonged to the Yorkshire Unitarian community, however, developed a denominational profile as an energetic activist on behalf of the beliefs and institutions of Unitarianism. The case of Catharine Cappe of York is some ways unique, but her importance at both national and regional levels gives her a claim to close attention. Scrutiny of Cappe's work reveals how, through the exploitation of her personal circumstances, she was able to negotiate a distinctive place for herself in fostering the development of the denomination.

Surveying the organisational evolution of urban Unitarian congregations in England during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Seed identifies, 'a gradual, uneven transition from patrician oligarchy to male, property-owning democracy,' taking place, especially after 1800, as the power to make decisions regarding chapel affairs shifted from the narrow elite of self-selecting trustees to a vestry committee elected by all who subscribed to the upkeep of the chapel. This shift raised the question of women's right to exercise authority in congregational business, as there were often women who were full subscribers in their own right.⁵⁹ Discovering the nature and scope of women's formal participation in the business of

⁵⁷At Mill Hill in 1829, excluding servants' pews, 110 men and 20 women rented whole or partial pews; at Northgate End in 1804, 46 men and 21 women did so.

⁵⁸In their study of the organisational activities of women in the Unitarian congregations of Birmingham, Davidoff and Hall emphasise the ways in which women were able both to negotiate access to formal decision-making processes and to contribute in other ways to the life of the chapel community. Leonore Davidoff and Catharine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987), especially pp. 134-136.

⁵⁹At the Birmingham New Meeting, for example, the issue was resolved by permitting women to vote by proxy for representatives to the vestry committee which was formed in the early 1780s. John Seed, 'Unitarianism and the formation of liberal culture,' pp. 275-6; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 135

the Unitarian congregations in Yorkshire is far from straightforward. There was no common standard by which all chapels operated, as each was a separate and self-governing institution. Moreover it can be difficult to track the organisational developments taking place in the congregations themselves, as the quantity and quality of information contained in minute books is frequently sketchy and incomplete, being wholly dependent on the diligence with which ministers and other chapel dignitaries applied themselves to the work of record-keeping. Piecing together fragments of evidence in order to try and uncover the factors which determined the extent and limitations of women's involvement produces results which are at times confusing or ambiguous. Nevertheless, a number of inferences can be drawn from the surviving records.

Each chapel developed its own internal practices for conducting congregational business. At St Saviourgate, York, for example, the practice of holding annual meetings of the congregation to settle matters relating to chapel affairs was instituted in 1784. In the congregational resolution which established these meetings the right to attend was explicitly restricted to 'Gentlemen of the Society', consistent with the general trend towards male subscribers' democracy outlined by Seed. This explicit statement of female exclusion was necessary: the adjoining list of annual contributors to the financial upkeep of the congregation shows that of the twenty-nine subscribers sixteen were women.⁶⁰ Northgate End, Halifax appointed a vestry committee from 1811, but there is no clear statement of policy regarding members' attendance and voting rights in the records.⁶¹ At the York, Halifax and Leeds chapels though there are suggestions that the right to participate in deliberations and decision-making on some issues at least may have been extended to a greater part of the congregation than was usual, including some of its women members. Evidence for the extension of the franchise in this way is especially strong regarding what was undoubtedly the most important decision affecting the life of any congregation, its choice of minister. Although no records exist of the voting processes by which the three chapels determined whom to invite to their pulpit, letters of invitation do survive, and in all cases during the period under discussion here the signatories included women. At York in 1801, when the congregation offered Charles Wellbeloved the post of full-time minister following the death of Newcome Cappe, their letter

⁶⁰'Resolution of the congregation, 23/1/1784,' UCSS 1/12, BIHR.

⁶¹'Northgate End Chapel Vestry Minutes, 1811-72,' NEC I A, WYAS (Calderdale).

of invitation was signed by twenty-two members, of whom twelve were women.⁶² In 1811 Richard Astley was invited to replace John Williams at Northgate End by a letter signed by thirty-five members of the congregation, of whom eleven can be positively identified as women.⁶³ When William Wood was invited to become minister at Mill Hill in 1773 eight of the one hundred and three signatories to his letter of invitation were women's, whilst on that sent to his successor, Thomas Jervis, in 1808, fifteen women and seventy-five men appended their signatures.⁶⁴

At the simplest level, these findings indicate that women were an acknowledged presence at the meetings at which deliberations took place over who should serve as their minister. Less obvious is the answer to the question of whether or not the presence of their signatures on the letters of invitation reflect their direct exercise of a vote on the issue, but it is possible that they do. Personal identification of the female signatories by cross-reference with other sources reveals that at both York and Halifax they were spinsters or widows who made direct financial contributions to the maintenance of their chapel through payment of subscriptions and/or pew rents, that is, women who had independent status as members of the congregational community.⁶⁵ At Leeds, the issue is more complicated, because although the overwhelming majority of women who signed the letters to both Wood and Jervis were independent congregants, at least one signatory to the latter, Sarah Stansfeld, was a married woman whose husband, David, also signed.⁶⁶ Women with an independent financial stake in the chapel fulfilled the property qualification on which men claimed voting rights. As the attendance of women at the meeting which invited Wellbeloved to take up permanent residence at York demonstrates, when settling the central question of whom to appoint as

⁶²Copy letter dated 1/1/1801 in 'Annual and special meeting minute book, 1844-1895,' entry for 25/1/1852, UCSS 1/19a, BIHR. Two signatories who signed with their initial and surname cannot be definitely identified as male or female by cross-reference with other sources.

⁶³Copy of invitational address, 15/12/1811, in 'Vestry Minutes, 1811-1872,' NEC I A, WYAS (Calderdale).

⁶⁴Mill Hill Chapel Minute Book, 1771-1858,' p. 11 and 65.

⁶⁵The female signatories at York were: R. Leach (spinster, subscriber), Mary Cappe, sen. (spinster, subscriber); Mary March (spinster, gentlewoman); Elizabeth. Hotham (spinster, gentlewoman); Elinor Hotham (spinster, gentlewoman); Catharine Cappe (widow); Mary, Sarah and Anne Cappe (spinsters); Susannah. Hotham (spinster, gentlewoman); E. Hailstone (widow, subscriber); Elizabeth Earby (spinster, subscriber). Those at Halifax were: Ann and Martha Ferguson (spinsters, pew rentals); Mary Wadsworth (widow, pew rental); Dorothy. Ralph (widow, pew rental); Hannah Kershaw (? , pew rental); Mary Threlkeld (widow, pew rental); Hannah and Mary Vicars (spinster, pew rental); Mary Kershaw (? , pew rental); Nelly Northwood ?Netherwood (spinster, pew rental). Grace Richardson could not be traced through cross-reference.

⁶⁶As David Stansfeld was a leading figure in the congregation it may have been that Sarah attended informally, and was permitted to sign the letter out of courtesy, but it is impossible to be certain. It seems unlikely, though, that she would have been able to exercise a vote, either directly or by proxy, given her husband's representation.

minister, the restriction of gender which usually covered congregational deliberations might be lifted. Even if women did not either actually exercise a vote at the meetings or vote by proxy, however, significant meaning still attached to their signing of letters of invitation. By permitting women to place their signatures on the letters the congregational community acknowledged their membership, and in the act of signing women claimed the right to make an active statement of their wishes on this key issue by explicitly ratifying the voters' decision. Indeed, the latter point is important, because it is clear from the records of subscribers and pew-holders that not all women, or for that matter all men, who were financial supporters of the chapel appeared as signatories. It may have been the case that for quite humdrum reasons - illness, apathy and so on - they did not attend the meetings, but it is also possible that they attended and did not approve of the minister elected by the majority. The right to sign the letter in agreement also offered the right to refuse to sign in dissent, and an unknown and unknowable number of women may have expressed their views to the assembly through this subtle form of protest.

Involvement in important congregational decisions was not, of course, the only way in which women could articulate their commitment to the values and beliefs of Unitarianism through their chapel activities. Unitarian chapels could claim some regular financial assistance from a small number of Dissenters' trust funds, but were otherwise largely self-supporting institutions. Thus to meet extraordinary expenses for building repairs or other undertakings, members of the congregation were expected to dig deep into their own pockets. Usually, the practice seems to have been for male heads of households to contribute, but again it is clear that widows and other single propertied women could make autonomous demonstrations of support. In the early 1770s at Mill Hill, for example, thirty-seven individuals subscribed to the fund for rebuilding the minister's house. Female contributors were two widows, Ann Rayner and Sarah Daniel, and an unspecified number of Miss Rayners who may have been Ann Rayner's step-daughters.⁶⁷ Ann Rayner's donation of twenty-one pounds was the eighth largest which the fund received. A similar pattern is evident in later fund-raising exercises, for the building of a new school-room in 1823, and for repairs to the exterior of the chapel in 1830. Cross-reference of the subscription list for the latter fund with the pew-rent register for the previous year shows that of the ten women who made donations all but two, Miss M. A. Oates and Miss C. Oates, rented pews in their own names.⁶⁸ When chapel repairs were needed

⁶⁷Mill Hill Chapel Minute Book, 1771-1858,' p. 10, Mill Hill 6, WYAS (Leeds).

⁶⁸Mill Hill Chapel Minute Book, 1771-1858,' p. 133, Mill Hill 6, WYAS (Leeds); 'Mill Hill Chapel Pew Rent Book, 1829-1848,' Mill Hill 18, WYAS (Leeds).

at Northgate End in 1818, thirteen of the fifty-one individual or joint donations received were from women, including the fourth-largest contribution of seventy-eight pounds. Again, these female donors were independent chapel members, but an anomaly to the usual pattern of spinsters and widows occurred in the person of Mrs William Rawson, formerly Elizabeth Threlkeld. Her husband was an Anglican, and this, along with the independent financial means which she evidently possessed, enabled her to operate autonomously within the congregational community, like a propertied single-woman or widow. Elizabeth Rawson rented a pew herself and contributed ten pounds to the chapel repair fund.⁶⁹

Women's opportunities to express formally their personal allegiance to and support for their chapel depended absolutely upon their marital and financial circumstances. Spinsters, especially those whose fathers were no longer alive, and widows occupied privileged positions over their married sisters in the congregation, being able to claim membership in their own right. For married women and their daughters, the husband and father who rented the family pew, participated in deliberative assemblies and displayed his munificence in responding to financial appeals, stood as their official representative in the chapel community.

During the 1810s and 1820s, however, a number of congregations actively sought to provide a wider cross-section of chapel attenders with a means of formally demonstrating their Unitarian allegiance with the establishment of new organisations called Fellowship Funds, the objective of which was to raise money for the promotion of Unitarianism. The drive to engage the support of more than just the usual family representatives may be understood as an attempt to foster a broader and deeper sense of community membership by a variety of means in the context of the Unitarian movement's evolving denominationalism. The Fund set up at St Saviourgate in 1819 aimed to offer occasional contributions to new chapels and to those in need of repair, to support a vestry library, and 'generally to promote the diffusion of Scriptural Truth.' Anyone was free to subscribe, and as subscriptions were just one penny a week the intention was evidently to attract support from all ranks of the congregation. All subscribers to the Fund could attend its annual general meeting and elect members to its committee, although the committee itself was all male.⁷⁰ When a similar Fund was established at Northgate End ten years later, the intention to draw in those who otherwise had no formal

⁶⁹Subscriptions received for repairs to the chapel, 1818, in 'Northgate End Chapel Vestry Minutes, 1811-1872,' NEC I A; 'Northgate End Chapel Pew Rents Upstairs, 1794-1819,' NEC I C 30; 'Northgate End Chapel Pew Rents Downstairs, 1794-1814,' NEC I C 28, all in WYAS (Calderdale). For biographical information on Elizabeth Rawson see John Wilson, 'Mrs Rawson and her diary,' *Transactions of the Halifax Archaeological Society* (1958), pp. 29-50.

⁷⁰Resolutions of the Congregation, 17/1/1819,' UCSS 1/12, BIHR.

existence in chapel business was even more explicitly stated in the recommendation that, 'the Subscribers be not limited to heads of families, but that as many individuals of each family as can make it convenient.' To set a good example William Turner, the minister by whom the Fund was doubtless initiated,⁷¹ his wife Mercy and daughter Sarah all subscribed. Not surprisingly, though, among the rest of the congregation multiple subscriptions by members of the same family were limited to the most affluent strata. At the first collection men and independent women subscribed; the lawyer, James Stansfeld, his wife Emma, their son and eldest daughter were the only example of a lay family in which dependants contributed in their own right alongside the household head.⁷²

A small number of women did, then, in limited ways, play a part in the organisational affairs of their chapel. In almost all cases, those who were able to do so were widows and spinsters. The way in which single status, and widowhood in particular, could provide women with opportunities to make more active contributions to the life of their religious community than were possible for married women is strikingly illustrated if we turn to focus on the activities of the few women who stepped beyond the confines of their congregation and sought to make a broader contribution to the development of Unitarianism as a religious movement. Although Unitarian writers asserted that it was the right and duty of all to subject the Scriptures to the test of their own unfettered reason, and that free discussion of theological matters would unfold the truth of God's revelation, engagement in influential investigation, debate and dissemination of theological and doctrinal matters was in practice very much the preserve of the denomination's academically educated male elite.⁷³ Lacking the intellectual qualifications or ability necessary to claim credibility as theologians in their own right did not, however, prevent a handful of committed women from carving out important roles for themselves both in the promotion of biblical criticism by male scholars and in the diffusion of its findings. For women of independent financial means, patronage offered a way in which, from 'behind the scenes', they could play a vital part in liberal scriptural research. In terms of national influence, Elizabeth Rayner of London was probably the most important

⁷¹Turner had taken up the post of minister at Halifax three years earlier and had been treasurer to the York Fund since its inception whilst he was serving as mathematics tutor at Manchester College.

⁷²'Northgate End Fellowship Fund Minute Book, 1829-65,' N.E.C II 195, WYAS (Calderdale).

⁷³Very occasionally exceptional women entered the fray. In 1832, for example, Harriet Martineau wrote the three prize-winning essays in a competition organised by the Unitarian Association, and attracting entries from established scholars and ministers, in which contestants were asked to suggest how Unitarianism might be promoted among Catholics, Jews and Muslims. *MR* (Second series), 6 (1832), p. 472, Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (London, 1877) pp. 150-159.

patroness,⁷⁴ and Mrs C. Heyes of Bristol, who settled in York in 1810 provides a less illustrious example of a woman using this route to foster Unitarian research. She bequeathed three hundred pounds to Charles Wellbeloved to enable him to publish an exposition of the singular conclusions which Newcome Cappe had drawn from his theological investigations.⁷⁵ Vicariously, posthumously even, these women participated in the development and diffusion of Unitarian ideas.

A more conspicuous part in the promotion of Unitarianism was assumed, however, by Catharine Cappe of York. Especially during the twenty years preceding her death in 1821, she played what was, for a woman, a remarkable role in the development of the Unitarian movement, a role testified to by the regularity with which her name appeared in denominational periodicals and other literature. As late as 1860, John Kenrick could write with confidence in a sectarian publication, 'The amiable disposition and intelligence of Mrs Cappe are too well-known to render it necessary to describe her character.'⁷⁶

Catharine Cappe's major religious works, and those which brought her to the attention of the wider Unitarian public, were the numerous editions of the devotional and critical writings of her late husband, Newcome, which she published following his death in 1800. By presenting herself simply as the channel through which Cappe's findings were being brought to light, Catharine clearly adopted elements of the conventional female guise of invisible assistant used by patronesses. In undertaking the publications, however, she attracted favourable attention from within the denomination, and exploited this position to forge an independent role for herself as an exponent and theorist of Unitarianism. She made what was in many ways an extraordinary contribution, for a woman, to the Unitarian movement, and it

⁷⁴Elizabeth Rayner had aristocratic connections by birth, and, especially after the death of her husband, considerable fortune. She was an early hearer at Lindsey's Unitarian chapel in London, through whom she made the acquaintance of Priestley. From the time of the latter's removal to Birmingham in 1780 Rayner provided him with an annual allowance plus numerous other sums of money to enable him to concentrate on his theological and scientific investigations, and on her death in 1800 he received two thousand pounds and Lindsey, half that sum. A short biographical account of Elizabeth Rayner is included in Belsham, *Memoir of Lindsey*, pp. 119-121; see also, Priestley, *Memoir of Priestley*, pp. 77-8; for her legacies see Theophilus Lindsey to Robert Millar, 13/11/1800, Robert Millar Papers, 12.46 (23), DWL.

⁷⁵It seems that Heyes may have moved to York specifically because she was a disciple of Cappe. His particular views on certain key passages of Scripture were not widely shared even in Unitarian circles, although Wellbeloved and Cappe's widow Catharine fully concurred with them. In 1809 the latter wrote to Lant Carpenter in Bristol, saying how much she was looking forward to Heyes arrival and observing, 'We have a high esteem for her character, & especially for that integrity of principles which can lead her to submit to many deprivations & to come among strangers for the sake of congenial views and similarity of pursuits.' Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 27/4/1810, MS Lant Carpenter 1 (12), HMC. Wellbeloved began the work, but it was never completed: Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, p. 112. For a description of the peculiar beliefs of 'Cappism' see *ibid.*, pp. 103-5.

⁷⁶Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, p. 34. See Appendix 5 for a list of her publications.

was specifically her place among the networks and institutions of the Yorkshire Unitarianism which enabled her to develop this profile.

Catharine was born in 1744 in Craven, North Yorkshire. Her mother came from a junior branch of a local gentry family and her father, Jeremiah Harrison, was the parish clergyman at Long Preston and later at Catterick. She traced the beginnings of her departure from religious orthodoxy to a remark of her father's which she overheard when aged about twelve. In an articulation of the Arian position which Catharine then embraced he described Christ as, 'That great personage who existed with God before all ages, by whom he made the worlds.'⁷⁷ After leaving school in her teens, Catharine became increasingly frustrated by her 'total want of some well-directed, improving and interesting pursuit,' finding the constant round of needlework insufficient to occupy her mind.⁷⁸ She found a source of inspiration, however, when following her father's death in 1763 Theophilus Lindsey took over the Catterick pulpit. Lindsey's wife, Hannah, and Catharine had been childhood friends and the Lindseys clearly now made a huge impression on her, as she consciously sought to imitate their example of tirelessly active benevolence in the local community.⁷⁹ When Lindsey seceded from the Church in 1773 Catharine was sufficiently convinced both of the truth of 'pure' Unitarianism and of the moral incompatibility of this belief with continued membership of the Anglican communion to follow suit.⁸⁰ The Lindseys lodged with Catharine and her mother at their Bedale home en route from Yorkshire to London, and were accompanied by the former on the next leg of their journey to William Turner's house at Wakefield. Her display of loyalty to the denomination's founding martyr in his time of trial earned Catharine the opprobrium of several of her genteel relations, but placed her in a position of some distinction within the Unitarian movement.⁸¹ A correspondence began between herself and Turner, from which it is evident that she was not only taking a serious interest in the progress

⁷⁷*Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 31-2.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁹The girls had been drawn together as Hannah (b. Elsworth) was step-daughter to Archdeacon Francis Blackburne with whom Jeremiah Harrison had been close friends. See Catharine Cappe, 'Memoir of Mrs Lindsey,' *MR* (1812) p. 109. For Catharine's favourable impressions of the Lindseys and their influence on her see especially *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 107-125.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, chs 29 and 43.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, pp. 165-6. Belsham wrote of Cappe, 'This lady ... who is herself well-known to the public by various works which equally display the superiority of her intellect and the ardour of her piety and benevolence, was the early and faithful friend of Mr and Mrs Lindsey: and to her great honour be it known, that this lady was one of the very few who remained firmly and affectionately attached to them in the season of severe trial, and who, upon all occasions, came forward as their generous and intrepid advocate, when many who had formerly made great professions, stood aloof, and not a few were disposed to cavil and condemn.' *Memoir of Lindsey*, p. 15 fn.

of and controversies surrounding Unitarianism, but also that she was even making efforts to distribute tracts arguing for the removal of clerical subscription among her acquaintances.⁸² She faced a dilemma over her conscientious objection to Anglican worship as there was no congenial dissenting chapel in the neighbourhood of Bedale, but in 1777 she and her mother moved into her brother's house seven miles from Leeds, a change which enabled her to attend Sunday services at Mill Hill chapel.⁸³ More significant, however, was the two women's removal to York in 1782, where Catharine became a member of Newcome Cappe's congregation at St Saviourgate. Cappe was a widower, over twenty years her senior with six grown-up children, and he and Catharine married in 1788. Through her relationship with Cappe, whom she described as her 'guide, counsellor and friend,'⁸⁴ Catharine's religious understanding was enhanced and her beliefs clarified.

It was Cappe's death twelve years after their marriage, however, which signalled the real beginning of Catharine's career as a public advocate of Unitarianism. She saw the unmistakable hand of Divine Providence in the fact of her widowhood: as Newcome Cappe's widow, she both had a duty to make known those scriptural truths which her husband had devoted his life to uncovering, and was accepted in this role by the denomination. Indeed, it seems that Catharine had these posthumous works planned from the first. Cappe was in poor and declining health throughout their married life, and soon after their marriage Catharine persuaded him to begin dictating to her from the shorthand notes of his scriptural investigations. In recounting her motives for marriage, she claimed that besides personal attachment,

I had long deeply regretted ... that his invaluable Scripture researches, and other fine compositions, should forever be buried in a short-hand, which had been composed by himself, and which was unintelligible to every other person. I knew but too well that his health was not such, had he been disposed to it, as should enable him to transcribe them himself...; and I hoped that if I became a member of his family, I might in this respect be some use to him, and at the same time, eventually, confer an important benefit to the rising generation.⁸⁵

⁸²See especially Catharine Harrison to William Turner, 3/4/1774, Letters to William Turner of Wakefield, 12.44 (16), DWL. See also *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 171-173 for her account of the controversy in the York press following Lindsey's removal which first brought Newcome Cappe to her notice.

⁸³*Ibid.*, pp. 186-90.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 243-4.

The majority of these theological works were simply transcripts of Cappe's notes, but as editor Catharine had considerable control over the texts. Besides being responsible for selecting and drafting the material, through the use of dedications and prefaces she created space for personal expression. In the 1811 edition of Cappe's *Discourses on the Providence and Government of God*, for example, she informed her readers that: 'To bring you to a better knowledge of this great Being, and to demonstrate his goodness and power, is the object of the following Discourses,' and exhorted them: 'endeavour to fix in your minds a deep and lasting impression of the great truths they contain.'⁸⁶ One work, however, *A Connected History of the Life and Divine Mission of Jesus Christ*, published in 1809, was more explicitly her own. It was an ambitious attempt to weave together the four gospel narratives, for which she painstakingly organised the scattered notes which Cappe had made in the margins of Bibles and on scraps of paper. Catharine then turned the work into a forum for the exposition of her own theological conclusions, by subjoining personal 'Reflections' to each section of the narrative.⁸⁷ The *Monthly Repository* praised the work and its author, of whom the reviewer wrote, 'She occupies an elevated station among the distinguished females of the age, as a writer and especially as a Christian scholar.'⁸⁸

Catharine's literary contribution to Unitarianism was not confined to the publication of these full-length works. She also used her access to Cappe's notes as a means of entry into the arena of debate and discussion about the nature, beliefs and practices of the Unitarian movement which became increasingly focussed during the early nineteenth century. Robert Aspland launched what could be described as the first mainstream periodical of the Unitarian denomination, the *Monthly Repository*, in 1806, and over the next fifteen years Catharine was a regular contributor; from 1813 onwards she wrote too for Aspland's rather more low-brow *Christian Reformer*. A major part of Newcome Cappe's biblical study had been devoted to interpreting what he saw as the figurative language in which much of the Scriptures were couched, and the first number of the *Repository* contained an article by Catharine in which she set out his reading of a particular biblical text. As justification of her offering she remarked, 'Among the many causes which have issued in the corruption of genuine Christianity, one, not

⁸⁶Newcome Cappe, *Discourses on the Providence and Government of God*, edited by Catharine Cappe, second ed. (London, 1811), p. 8.

⁸⁷Catharine Cappe, *A Connected History of the Life and Divine Mission of Jesus Christ as Recorded in the Narratives of the Four Evangelists, with Notes Selected from the Shorthand Papers of the Late Reverend Newcome Cappe: to which are added reflections arising from the several subjects of each section* (York, 1809).

⁸⁸MR, 6 (1811), p. 249.

the least powerful, has arisen from mistaking the sense of some peculiar terms and phrases.’⁸⁹ But whilst publicizing Cappe's discoveries remained an important strand of her writings,⁹⁰ she also began to offer her own opinions and observations on the progress and development of Unitarianism. In doing so, she endeavoured to combine her commitment to the promotion of Unitarian beliefs with the refusal to adopt a narrowly sectarian outlook. So, for example, she argued that the appellation ‘Unitarian’ was not an appropriate one to fix to old Presbyterian congregations, whose distinguishing principle was, she argued, ‘the right of exercising private judgement in matters of religion.’ The adoption of Unitarian beliefs was a consequence, rather than an intrinsic element, of that principle, and naming congregations as Unitarian effectively acted as a barrier to free enquiry.⁹¹ She was clearly disturbed too by the odium with which Unitarians were viewed by other groups of professing Christians, especially those of an evangelical persuasion. Looking forward to a time when

Christians cease to anathematize those, who having departed from the generally received systems of contradictory articles and creeds, of mere human composition, fabricated in an age of bigotry, ignorance and superstition, presume to give a different, and as they conceive a far more rational and consistent interpretation of the highly figurative language of Eastern phraseology,

she urged attention to be focussed on the ‘essentials’ of belief which united different denominations.⁹²

Through her writings, Catharine was able to gain access to the intellectual realm of Unitarianism where ideas were discussed, debated and exchanged. This sphere was almost exclusively populated by men in general and ministers in particular, but it was far from the case that each of her publications represented an isolated point of engagement with the activities of the denomination's intelligentsia between which she retreated from the scene. Rather, Catharine became integrated into the informal networks which bound together the leading Unitarian ministers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As we have seen, her closeness to Lindsey had put her in touch with the radical religious networks of the 1770s, and it is likely that during her married years she kept up at least some of these

⁸⁹*MR*, 1(1806), p. 27.

⁹⁰See her plea for the importance of paying attention to Cappe's findings in *MR*, 5 (1810), pp. 118-9, and her account of his interpretation of the miraculous conception in *MR*, 8 (1813), p. 15.

⁹¹*MR*, 3 (1809), p. 667.

⁹²*MR*, 12 (1818), p. 259

connections.⁹³ It was her publications after Cappe's death, though, which created real opportunities for the cultivation of correspondence and friendship of which she took full advantage, developing an influential array of contacts. In 1802, for example she began a twenty-year-long correspondence with Lant Carpenter of Bristol after he wrote to her regarding the memoir of Newcome Cappe which she had published in the previous year.⁹⁴ A regular correspondence with Robert Aspland similarly blossomed out of her work for the *Monthly Repository*.⁹⁵ She forged links too with important Unitarian ministers in America during the closing years of her life, most notably with William Ellery Channing of Boston.⁹⁶

The contents of her letters, and the uses which she made of these relationships, mirror the concerns which surface in the correspondences between ministers. Primarily, their networks operated as a medium for the sharing and diffusion of Unitarian ideas, and Catharine tapped into them for the same purpose. A letter which she sent to Aspland in 1813 offers a typical example. He had apparently written to her expressing approval of one of her editions of Newcome Cappe's *Critical Dissertations*, and she began by outlining her ambitious reasons for wishing to see Cappe's views more widely known: 'I believe them to be just, and consequently the only ones which can furnish an effectual answer to the objections of unbelievers, and produce entire conviction of the great truths of the gospel on calm, enlightened and philosophic minds.' She thanked Aspland for sending the dissertations to a Unitarian scholar to whom she was not personally acquainted, and requested that he also forward the enclosed copies of her additional notes on her *Life of Christ*. After some remarks about pieces which she was hoping to send for insertion in the *Repository*, she offered critical reflections on Belsham's recently-published memoir of Lindsey, suggesting that he had misrepresented some of Lindsey's beliefs on the nature of Christ. In the final paragraph, she told Aspland that she had passed his letter on to Wellbeloved to read, and gave a brief report of the state of Manchester College.⁹⁷ Besides engaging in rational theological discussion

⁹³She was in constant correspondence with Hannah Lindsey until the former's death in 1811, but the extreme debility under which Newcome Cappe laboured for most of their married life makes it likely that she also had to undertake correspondence with ministers on his account. When his invalidity made it absolutely necessary for an assistant minister to be engaged in the early 1790s, Catharine, 'made inquiry ... by every means in my power, without Mr. Cappe's knowledge, yet in his name,' to find a suitable candidate, and this would certainly have involved her communicating with leading ministers. *Life of Catharine Cappe*, especially pp. 254-6.

⁹⁴Letters from Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

⁹⁵See Aspland, *Memoir of Aspland*, pp. 333-4; 371-2 and 441-2.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 441; Cappe, *Life of Cappe*, pp. 460-4; *MR*, 14 (1819), pp. 490-1; *MR*, 15 (1820), pp. 14 and 511; Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 9/10/1819 and 14/3/1/1820, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

⁹⁷Aspland, *Memoir of Aspland*, pp. 333-334.

herself in this letter, Catharine was also using her friendship with Aspland to make contact with other strands in the ministerial network and to obtain feedback on her own work. Sadly, little of her correspondence with American ministers survives alongside her other letters,⁹⁸ but she was evidently anxious to bring her transatlantic insights to the attention of her English correspondents. Writing to Carpenter in 1819, for example, she gave a resume of a new review periodical recently begun in Boston of which Channing had forwarded her a copy, along with a brief summary of Channing's letter in which he reported on the favourable reception with which Cappe's devotional writings had met in Boston.⁹⁹ Indeed, she made a significant, if unwitting, contribution to the later development of English Unitarianism by her role in the diffusion of Channing's ideas when, through Carpenter, she indirectly introduced his work to the young James Martineau.¹⁰⁰

Catharine could not, of course, become a minister in her own right, but by her pen she managed to achieve a kind of honorary status in their circle. That she was well-respected by some is apparent, as those with whom she forged close links showed a willingness to assist in the wider dissemination of her writings. When Aspland founded the Unitarian Tract Society in 1810 for the distribution of pamphlets and books which set out Unitarian views in a non-controversial way, he commissioned Catharine to write the third essay.¹⁰¹ In the same year, she proposed sending Carpenter two hundred copies of her intended reprint of Cappe's sermons on the providence and government of God for distribution through the Western Unitarian Society, to which he evidently agreed.¹⁰²

The arrival of Manchester College in York in 1803 provided Catharine with an

⁹⁸An unfinished letter to Channing which she began on the day of her death was appended by her step-daughter to her autobiography. Cappe, *Life of Cappe*, pp. 400-404.

⁹⁹Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 9/10/1819, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

¹⁰⁰In 1821 Carpenter visited York to attend the examinations at Manchester College, and lodged with Catharine. She showed him a sermon of Channing's sent from America on 'the decisive evidence of the divine mission of our Lord,' which Carpenter approved so highly that he took it back to Bristol for use in his chapel and his school where Martineau was a pupil. By the 1830s, Martineau had become the leading figure in a new breed of Unitarian ministers, breaking with several key points of the older dominant Priestleyan theology-philosophy, to put forward a different interpretation of Unitarianism. His debt to Channing has been identified in four important areas of belief: first, the central place of Christ in Christianity as a link between humanity and God; secondly, the understanding of Unitarianism as a transitory doctrinal position held by individuals, not the creed of a church; thirdly, the assertion of divine goodness was intuitively known and inwardly discerned; and finally, the rejection of philosophical necessity. See, Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 403; Carpenter, *Memoirs of Carpenter*, pp. 259-60; Ralph Waller, 'James Martineau: the development of his religious thought,' in Smith (ed.), *Truth, Liberty and Religion*, pp. 245-264, especially pp. 242-245.

¹⁰¹Aspland, *Memoir of Aspland*, p. 249.

¹⁰²Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 27/4/1810, Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

institutional focus both for her efforts for the advancement of Unitarianism and for the cultivation of ministerial connections. She had a very close relationship with Charles Wellbeloved dating back to 1792 when he had been appointed as Newcome Cappe's co-minister and was embraced virtually as an adopted son by the Cappe household.¹⁰³ This friendship both stimulated her interest in the welfare of the College and gave her exceptional knowledge of and access to its internal affairs. In its education of future generations of dissenting ministers, she believed, the College represented perhaps the most important means by which Unitarian principles might be upheld and diffused. Writing to Lant Carpenter in 1803 in an - ultimately unsuccessful - attempt to persuade him to take up the post of assistant tutor to Wellbeloved, she reflected,

I really consider the success or failure of the new institution so closely connected with the interests of genuine Christianity in this Country, ... & therefore, although we know that God can work by means apparently the most inadequate, yet to be at all assisting in such a work is to attain the highest honour.¹⁰⁴

Catharine developed her own strategies for assisting with the work of the College. In a practical way she helped the institution through her efforts in fundraising and publicity. Wellbeloved had grave misgivings about the wisdom of his undertaking when he agreed to become Principal of the College, and when it opened in York it had neither a sound financial foundation nor adequate accommodation and staff.¹⁰⁵ Although an assistant tutor was appointed the following year in the shape of the Scots Presbyterian Hugh Kerr, the overwhelming burden of work was still carried by Wellbeloved and in 1806 he suffered a breakdown which threatened his own life and appeared to signal the death-knell for the College. As the only dissenting academy run on the principles of non-subscription and free enquiry, the passing of Manchester College would have been a major setback for the Unitarian movement. Determined 'to try if the apathy which seemed to have paralysed every rational

¹⁰³Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁴Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 28/8/1803, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC. The correspondence between Cappe and Carpenter which began in 1802 and lasted until her death, stemmed directly from her Unitarian publications. That year she had published a memoir of Newcome Cappe, in which she alluded to notes which he had made on Hartley which were 'locked up in unintelligible shorthand,' and Carpenter wrote to offer to try and translate them. Catharine took his offer as a sign of the highest quality of character: 'Such zeal and ardour to engage in a difficult undertaking for the sake merely of promoting what you conceive might be important to the cause of truth & virtue, will doubtless render you in your progress through life highly useful to others,' and led to her eagerness to see him engaged as a tutor at the College. See Carpenter, *Memoir of Lant Carpenter*, p. 89; Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 5/6/1802, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

¹⁰⁵See John Seed, 'Manchester College at York: an early nineteenth-century dissenting academy,' *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 14 (1982), pp. 9-17; Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, ch. 47.

and generous exertion in the dissenting public could not be roused into some degree of animation and vigour,' Catharine wrote confidentially to her friend William Turner of Newcastle setting out the importance of the College and the apparent imminence of its demise, and successfully asking for his help in raising funds.¹⁰⁶ A year later, she made a public appeal herself in the *Monthly Repository*. Whilst the mental and moral improvement made by students under Wellbeloved's care had so far been considerable, the 'stability, and continually increasing reputation' of the College could only be assured, she warned, 'if its subscriptions were so augmented as to admit of the appointment of a third Tutor, ... it being impossible that the constitution of any man should much longer support the unceasing mental exertion which has hitherto devolved upon the theological Tutor.'¹⁰⁷

Her efforts to promote Unitarianism through the work of the College also took a more direct form as she personally involved herself in the education of divinity students, that is, those destined for careers in the ministry. Academically, of course, their education lay in the hands of the tutors, but Catharine appears to have endeavoured to carve out a niche for herself as an influence on their moral and behavioural development. As the public face and guiding spirit of Unitarianism it was especially important that ministers be conspicuous for their exemplary character and conduct. 'Eminent characters among rational Christian ministers, were certainly never more wanted,' she observed to Lant Carpenter.¹⁰⁸ One of the principal reasons for the success in gaining converts evident among the exponents of 'what is erroneously called evangelical religion' was, she contended, the model conduct and evident piety of their ministers, in contrast to what was often perceived as the cold, cheerless and worldly aspect of their Unitarian counterparts.¹⁰⁹ Indirectly, she attempted to infuse the divinity students with the spirit of holiness which she believed to be so essential in their chosen profession by dedicating her 1815 edition of Cappe's *Discourses on Devotional*

¹⁰⁶Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 385-7.

¹⁰⁷*MR*, 2 (1807), p. 114-6. Wellbeloved's burden was finally relieved in 1810, when John Kenrick and William Turner, junior, the son of William Turner of Newcastle, were appointed tutors of Classics and Mathematics respectively. An indication of the exhausting workload under which Wellbeloved laboured before these appointments is revealed in the following remarks which he made to George William Wood: 'My days and weeks move away I know not how. They find me always in a bustle. Some work always pressing to be done, and that work so varied as greatly to distract my attention, and yet so urgent that it cannot be postponed. I envy the Scotch professors who have one object to attend, one branch of knowledge only to teach ... who have not to go from Virgil and Tacitus to Theology, from Theology to ancient History, from ancient History to modern, then to Ethics, then to Theology again, and so on without intermission, and after five days fagging in this distracted manner, to sit down to sermonize.' MS Wood 1 (101-2) HMC.

¹⁰⁸Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, Essex Street, 1805; endor. Aug 1805, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC..

¹⁰⁹*MR*, 12 (1818), pp. 113-4.

Subjects to them.¹¹⁰ But she also adopted a more informal, intimate strategy in her efforts to aid in the personal development of students, by offering them friendship and opportunities for improving conversation at her own house. Shortly after her death, George Kenrick, who had attended the College from 1809 to 1814, paid a tribute to her in which he observed, 'The *divinity students at the college* have particular reason to remember the delight and improvement with which they listened to her conversation, and the unbounded generosity and kindness with which she followed them to the field of their several labours in after life.'¹¹¹ Her correspondence certainly indicates that the friendships which she formed with at least some of the students continued long after they had left York. Joseph Hunter, Unitarian minister at Bath and an eminent antiquarian, and Benjamin Morden, minister of a congregation in Glasgow, for example, exchanged letters with her until her death.¹¹² She continued to urge them to abide by the highest code of conduct as a recommendation of their beliefs. To the latter, for instance, she lamented the accusation levelled against Unitarians that their creed was, 'cold, chilling and lifeless,' and urged discretion when dealing with matters of speculative or disputed doctrine from the pulpit. Justifying these words of caution, she pleaded, 'You will forgive this hint from an old & very sincere friend, who has not a more sincere wish than for your usefulness and future prospects, and that the gospel may prosper in your hands.'¹¹³ By seeking to influence the conduct of ministers, Catharine hoped to encourage the development of the Unitarian movement at the highest level.

Women, community and cultural life

Like other denominations, Unitarianism was more than just a religious system - it offered a cultural and social sphere to its members. Women's involvement was integral to this

¹¹⁰Address, in *Discourses Chiefly on Devotional Subjects*. Describing her motives for this dedication, she reflected, "Thinking, as I do, that the more enlightened principles which these young men are likely to profess, as those of pure and genuine Christianity, the unsophisticated word of God, though so generally misunderstood, and often unjustly calumniated; I could not but most ardently wish that they may, through life, "adorn the holy doctrine they profess," by the uniform practice of every social and personal virtue, and that they may ever bear in mind the solemn exhortation of the apostle, so earnestly recommended in these Discourses, of "not being conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds.'" *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 422.

¹¹¹*MR*, 16 (1821), pp. 518-9.

¹¹²For Catharine's friendship with Hunter: see Bell, *Peeps into the Past*, p. 130; MS Lant Carpenter 1 (19); MS Wood 7 (52-3), HMC.

¹¹³Catharine Cappe to Benjamin Morden, 22/2/1850, MS Evans 1. HMC.

cultural world, both in the sense that their pursuit of intellectual advancement was fostered in a variety of ways, and because they participated alongside men in some of its activities. Evidence from Yorkshire indicates that, broadly speaking, women gained entry into Unitarian cultural life through two main routes. First, their congregational membership offered them a number of organised spaces where they could share in pursuits which were designed to educate and enlighten. Secondly, informal opportunities for mental cultivation were created through the local and national networks of kinship and friendship which bound Unitarians together

Not surprisingly, within chapel communities the officiating minister was usually the key figure in organising and leading educational activities, but it is important to appreciate that in doing so he was acting primarily in response to lay demand. As was discussed in chapter two above, scholarly intellectualism was an essential ingredient in the model of manliness constructed around Unitarian ministers. John Seed's exploration of changing lay perceptions about the role of Unitarian ministers from the mid-eighteenth century onwards helps to illuminate how this ideal of masculinity was related to the practical duties which congregations expected their ministers to perform. Rational Dissent had always assumed a high level of literacy among both its clerical and lay adherents, but during the later eighteenth century, and especially in the more fashionable, urban congregations, the laity became increasingly integrated into the world outside 'the sect,' as business and commercial contacts led to a greater degree of participation in polished, genteel, culture and society. A concomitant of this development was growing hostility among the laity to 'priestcraft,' and priestly interference in their private affairs. Thus the pastoral role of ministers largely came to reside in the sphere of learned pulpit oration.¹¹⁴ It may have been in response to these changing expectations about the nature of their office that many ministers sought to carve out a niche for themselves as intellectual leaders within their chapels, perhaps as an alternative way of asserting leadership and commanding the respect of their flock.

Conducting lecture courses in which they elucidated some branch of religious learning for the instruction and edification of their congregation was the educational scheme most usually employed by ministers, and it is evident that women attended these lectures. An unusually full eye-witness account of such a course was produced by Catharine Cappe for insertion in the *Monthly Repository*, where she described the weekly evening lectures given by Charles Wellbeloved at York in the winter of 1818-19 'explanatory of Unitarian principles, derived from the gospel.' Wellbeloved's plan was, Cappe informed her readers,

¹¹⁴Seed, 'Formation of liberal culture,' pp. 93-104.

to select his texts from passages usually adduced in proof of the orthodox doctrines ... then giving specimens of the same terms in the original, differently applied in the common version, and examining them in connection with the context, and with the scenes, occasions and discussions from whence they took their rise, and then deducing the most satisfactory evidence that, far from proving the deity of Christ, they are on the contrary, in perfect harmony with the multiplied express declarations of his being the Messiah, indeed, but of his perfect humanity.¹¹⁵

By attending these lectures, those who were usually excluded from the more arcane aspects of biblical scholarship, including of course women, had an opportunity to engage with this cornerstone activity of Unitarianism. The lectures were sufficiently popular for Wellbeloved to resume them the following winter, this time dealing with the related subject of 'the extreme importance of the christian [*sic*] scriptures & of their being rightly understood.'¹¹⁶ At Northgate End, William Turner, erstwhile mathematics tutor at Manchester College, initiated a lecture series in conjunction with the Fellowship Fund, which as we have seen was open to men and women of the congregation. As a means of maintaining interest in the Fund, he proposed 'to deliver short Lectures upon various religious subjects' when there was no other business to transact at its meetings.¹¹⁷ Sometimes, lecture courses were directed at particular sections of the congregation. In 1785, for example, William Wood began to deliver a series of talks on religious topics to the younger attenders at Mill Hill chapel, and there is no reason to suppose that girls were not invited.¹¹⁸ There is a suggestion that in some cases the educational programmes provided by ministers were open only to men, although it is by no means conclusive. During the late 1760s it was reported that Joseph Priestley was reading his Warrington Academy lectures to 'the Gentⁿ at Leeds,'¹¹⁹ but of course the possibility cannot be discounted that women did attend, even if they were not Priestley's main target audience. It is possible too that he provided separate lectures on religion specifically for women in his congregation, as he was later to do at the Birmingham New Meeting.¹²⁰ The extent in which

¹¹⁵*MR*, 14 (1819), p. 292. It seems highly likely, given Catharine Cappe's constant concern to seek ways of promoting Unitarianism, that she hoped the publication of this description of Wellbeloved's lectures would stimulate other ministers to similar exertions.

¹¹⁶Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 9/10/1819, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

¹¹⁷'Northgate End Fellowship Fund Minute Book, 1829-63,' NEC II (195).

¹¹⁸Wellbeloved, *Memoir of Wood*, p. 28.

¹¹⁹Benjamin Vaughan to John Seddon 22/8/1767, MS Seddon 172-3, HMC.

¹²⁰After visiting Priestley at Birmingham in 1783, Theophilus Lindsey reported to William Turner of Wakefield, 'I was surprised on Sunday afternoon on going into the Vestry ... to see near thirty young ladies, some of em [*sic*] I was told married, seated to be instructed in the principles of Christianity.' 'Letters to William Turner of

lecturing became not just an accepted, but an expected, function of Unitarian ministers is illustrated by a dispute which erupted at Upper Chapel, Sheffield in 1812. Backed by leading members of the congregation Henry Hunt Piper, minister of the satellite chapel at Norton, tried to persuade the Upper Chapel minister Nathaniel Philipps to begin giving Sunday evening lectures. Philipps initially refused, arguing that Sunday evenings should be employed in private and family devotions, but he was forced to relent when faced with threats of secession from a number of influential congregants.¹²¹

Evening lectures like those given at York and Sheffield were, in theory at least, open to all. Indeed, in her account of Wellbeloved's course quoted from above Catharine Cappe was explicit in stating that many who had no previous connection with St Saviourgate chapel had been present. Some educational organisations were set up, though, which had a more exclusive kind of shared learning experience as their objective, as the Northgate End Book Society established at Halifax in 1814 illustrates. Raising money by individual subscriptions of not less than eight shillings per year, the society aimed to buy books, pamphlets and periodicals for circulation among its members, which would then be sold to the highest bidder at the end of each year. The combination of denominational and Whig periodicals to which the society subscribed reveals its prevailing political tendency.¹²² Membership was restricted to a select circle of elite families and individuals in the congregation. Besides the minister, Richard Astley, the first subscription list consisted of nine men and six women including the banker brothers, William and Rawdon Briggs; Dr John Thompson; Nicholas Kershaw, woollen merchant; William Huntriss, wool-stapler; Mary Threlkeld and Dorothy Ralph, widows of former Northgate End ministers; and a son and daughter of the latter. In order to preserve the desired social exclusivity, anyone wishing to join had to be proposed by a current member and accepted by majority vote. Evidence from the subscription lists over subsequent years suggests that, with the exception of professional new blood like the physician Richard Moulson and the lawyer James Stansfeld and his wife Emma, those who were permitted to join belonged to the families of existing members. The society was not, however, merely a circulating library, and recognising its wider agenda certainly helps to explain its restrictive admissions policy. It was constituted not only to provide access to informative literature, but also to create a forum for the kind of mixed polite sociability in which literary discussion

Wakefield,' 12:44 (38), DWL

¹²¹Bell, *Peeps into the Past*, p. 195.

¹²²The society took *The Monthly Repository*, *The Edinburgh Review*, *The Critical Review* and *The Monthly Review*.

could take place and which was itself deemed beneficial to the mental and moral cultivation of both sexes. Members were to meet once in alternate months at one of their homes, 'to take tea and transact the business of the society.' Using the domestic space for a social function enabled women to act in the capacity of hostesses, and they were often a leading presence at the meetings. At Dorothy Ralph's house in 1819, for example, those present were: four of her single daughters; her daughter and son-in-law, Emma and James Stansfeld; Richard Astley and his wife, and the brother and sister William and Ann Briggs.¹²³ The inclusion of women in the intellectual, social activities of the chapel community demonstrated in an institutional way Unitarianism's practical commitment to the creation of mixed learning opportunities.

The Northgate End Book Society provided an semi-formal framework for the coordination of sexually mixed polite social pursuits, occupying a position on the fringes of the organised cultural world of Unitarianism. However, its key features - educational intentions, the promotion of mixed sociability, the domestic location of meetings, and the participation of a close circle of friends - were also characteristic of activities conducted on a less formal basis. Evidence from provincial Unitarian networks suggests a widespread trend in which an intimate and intellectually rigorous social sphere evolved centred on the elite circle of family and friends belonging to the local Unitarian chapel. Thomas Asline Ward, a Sheffield cutler and merchant, moved from Anglicanism to Unitarianism during the 1800s, and his diaries record how this religious shift was complemented by gradual integration into the social world of the town's Unitarian elite. Ward's account of some of the activities of this network reveals both the central nature of women's participation and the way in which it functioned to provide a space where women could pursue their own literary and intellectual interests. In the mid-1810s, among the most prominent women in the Sheffield Unitarian circle was Eliza Shore, probably the Maria Eliza discussed above in relation to the school at Norton. It was, apparently, her frequent practice to arrive at social gatherings with a copy of Dugald Stewart's *Philosophy of the Human Mind*, and to read excerpts from it to the assembled company for discussion. Shore was also the brains behind a manuscript periodical, 'The Gleaner,' which she established in order to provide women in the circle with a medium for the communication and discussion of their ideas, although some men contributed too.¹²⁴ In practice, the boundary distinguishing the aims and activities of Unitarians' organised book

¹²³'Minute Book of the Pamphlet Society, 1814-1826,' NEC III (197), WYAS (Calderdale).

¹²⁴Bell, *Peeps into the Past*, p. 205.

societies from their informal discussion groups was blurred.¹²⁵

As both an institutional forum where the minister imparted scholarly instruction and a focus for the forging of cultural social relations the Unitarian chapel afforded women, and especially those from the congregation's leading families, a supportive environment where they could engage in a variety of pastimes of essentially educational and edifying design. The creation and exploitation of educational opportunities beyond the world of formal schooling was not, though, linked solely to women's congregational affiliation. Other networks and relationships bound the denomination's elite together, and by exploiting these connections, channels were opened up through which women could make contact with enlightened circles of literary and intellectual distinction.

One educational practice adopted by parents was that of sending young adult daughters on 'improving' journeys to visit relatives or friends whose society it was believed would be advantageous to their mental and moral development. The paucity of auto/biographical accounts of Yorkshire Unitarian women means that it is impossible to determine how frequently such excursions formed part of the educational programme of women beyond school age, but there is evidence which suggests that they were undertaken at least by those from particularly well-connected families. By taking advantage of family and friendship connection Charles Wellbeloved's eldest daughter Laetitia, for example, was introduced into the literary coterie around the celebrated Aikin family in Stoke Newington, Wellbeloved's wife, Ann, was the younger daughter of John Kinder and his wife Anna Laetitia Aikin who, by the complication of family intermarriage, was first cousin to Anna Barbauld and John Aikin, and also sister-in-law to the latter who had married her sister, Martha.¹²⁶ Ann Kinder, therefore, was John Aikin's niece, and she and Wellbeloved married in 1792.¹²⁷ They met whilst he was a student at Hackney College between 1787 to 1791, during which time he

¹²⁵Examples of similar networks elsewhere in the country are numerous. For example, at Norwich a vibrant culture of literary and philosophical discussion flourished which centred on the Unitarian Octagon chapel in which Susannah Taylor, daughter-in-law of the erstwhile Warrington tutor, John, was a leading figure. R. K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: a radical Victorian* (London, 1960), pp. 54-6. At Leicester, the Unitarian Great Meeting was an important social hub bringing together those literary and scientific interests in the town, and women were included in their activities. When Elizabeth Coltman's husband John organised a series of philosophical lectures to be held at his house, she and her friend Mrs Reid, also a worshipper at the Old Meeting, became, 'the first ladies in Leicester who ventured into a philosophical lecture room.' Catherine Hutton Beale, *Catherine Hutton and her Friends* (Birmingham, 1895), pp. 64-5

¹²⁶See the genealogical table in Betsy Rogers, *Georgian Chronicle: Mrs Barbauld and her family* (London, 1958), p. 8; Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, p. 32.

¹²⁷Ann Wellbeloved was evidently close to her uncle, as in 1817 Charles Wellbeloved told George William Wood, 'Mrs W. left me this morning for Newington, being desirous of seeing her mother and Dr Aikin once more, both of whom are in a very precarious state of health.' MS Wood 1 (fols. 205-6), HMC.

moved in the radical dissenting networks which revolved around both the College and the chapels over which Richard Price presided at Hackney and Newington Green. He was also integrated into the Aikin circle through the close and enduring friendship which he formed with his fellow-student, Arthur Aikin, Ann's cousin.¹²⁸ In 1812, when she was seventeen years old, Laetitia Wellbeloved was sent to stay with her widowed grandmother Anna Laetitia Kinder at Newington.¹²⁹ Given her age and the choice of destination, it seems very likely that at least part of the purpose behind this visit was to enable Laetitia to enter into and benefit from the cultivated society of the literary luminaries belonging to the close-knit Aikin family.¹³⁰ The Wellbeloved family's connections placed them in an enviable position to secure access for Laetitia to an educational environment which was eagerly sought after by several leading Unitarians and radicals for their daughters. During the closing years of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, Anna Barbauld was persuaded to take in a small number of girls as private pupils, including Joseph Priestley's granddaughter, Anne Finch; Susannah Taylor of Norwich's daughter, Sally; Mary Ann Galton, daughter of the radical Birmingham Quaker and Lunar Society member, Samuel Galton, and two daughters of the radical Edinburgh authoress Eliza Fletcher, Bessy and Grace.¹³¹ Describing her motives for placing Bessy under Barbauld's care, Eliza Fletcher recalled, 'I wished my dear child to have a high standard of intellectual and moral perfection.'¹³² Whilst Laetitia Wellbeloved entered into this circle in a less formal way than Barbauld's pupils, the intended benefits to her of such intercourse would have been the same.

Family connections also gave women access to the intellectual hub of early nineteenth-century Unitarian networks, Manchester College at York. Women had always been an

¹²⁸Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, pp. 10-32.

¹²⁹John Kenrick, who in 1821 married Laetitia Wellbeloved, wrote to his brother Samuel, 'If you wish to see Laetitia Welby, who is a very nice girl, you may by speaking to your magnanimous heart, and calling upon Mrs Kinder, Mrs W's mother, who lives at Newington.' John Kenrick to Samuel Kenrick, 4/3/1812 Letter Box D (ADD).

¹³⁰An intimate relationship existed between Anna Laetitia Kinder and the family of John and Martha Aikin, and the latter's eldest granddaughter recalled: 'My grandmother's only sister lived close to them She was an affectionate, lively woman of whom all the family were extremely fond; indeed, she was the principal inducement to come to Newington at first. She and my grandmother were fondly attached to each other.' A. L. le Breton, *Memoirs of Seventy Years, by One of a Literary Family, edited by Mrs Herbert Martin*, (London, 1883), pp. 33-4.

¹³¹See, Rogers, *Georgian Chronicle*, pp.101-3; Christiana C. Hankin, *Life of Mary Ann Schimmelpenninck*, second ed. (London, 1858), pp. 296-7; [Eliza Fletcher,] *Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher, With Letters and Other Family Memorials* (Edinburgh, 1875), pp. 101-117.

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 101.

important presence in the community life of dissenting academies. The earliest academies were run simply in the house of their principal and in the later, more institutional colleges, the lodging and boarding arrangements were intended to capture the feel of an extended family. Tutors were often married with children, and the wives of some were expected to fulfil specific roles which were vital to the smooth day-to-day running of the college. During the first fifteen years of Manchester College's sojourn at York, Ann Wellbeloved was responsible for overseeing all the housekeeping arrangements,¹³³ and Laetitia assisted her in drawing up the accounts.¹³⁴ When her declining health made alternative arrangements necessary, responsibility was passed to Mercy Turner, wife of William the mathematics tutor, in 1819. This change was seen by the George William Wood, Secretary of the College Trustees, as a chance to overhaul domestic arrangements. The Turners were to occupy a house in the College buildings, from where they could exercise more immediate care and authority over the students outside lecture hours in the interests of maintaining discipline. Having a woman present was crucial to the attempt to create a more intimate, familial domestic environment, as the recollections of Arthur Paget, a lay student in the mid-1820s, reveal: 'The students met for breakfast, dinner and supper in the dining-room of Mr Turner's house. ... The dinner table, which formed three sides of a square, was presided over not only by Mr Turner, but also by his wife.'¹³⁵

Women's participation in College life was not, though, confined to carrying out housekeeping duties. Although officially the College was a male concern training young men for professional careers, and its organised networking activities such as the annual examinations which brought ministers and laymen to York were likewise male-dominated affairs, its informal, extra-curricular social sphere was open to women. Indeed, dissenting academies had a tradition of cultivating an atmosphere which was conducive to enlightened mixed sociability. Accounts of the vibrant social life which animated Warrington Academy in the 1760s, for example, stress the way in which students, tutors and their wives and families, and members of the local Rational Dissenting community joined together to create

¹³³Davis, *Manchester College*, p. 79.

¹³⁴See Charles Wellbeloved to George William Wood, 2/3/1812, MS Wood 1 (fols. 130-1); same to same, 2/5/1814, MS Wood (fols. 159-60); Ann Wellbeloved to George William Wood, 5/6/1816, MS Wood 1 (fols. 188-9), all in HMC.

¹³⁵Quoted in James Drummond and C. B. Upton, *The Life and Letters of James Martineau* (2 vols., London, 1902), i, p. 26. When the academy's principal was not married, then another female family member was expected to undertake the post of housekeeper, as Thomas Belsham's sister Elizabeth did first at Daventry Academy and later at Hackney College. John Williams, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Thomas Belsham* (London, 1833), pp. 198-9 and 402-7.

an environment which was intellectual, polite and effervescent.¹³⁶ At Hackney in the late 1780s and 1790s, women were attenders at the public lectures and meetings held in connection with the college there.¹³⁷ The social sphere around the College at York does not appear to have either scaled the cultural heights of Warrington with its Aikins and Priestleys, or offered a programme of open lectures by which outsiders could directly benefit from its scholarship. Nevertheless, it provided a social forum for families connected with the College and local Unitarians which enabled women to share in the life of the major English institution of liberal education. The Wellbeloveds' four daughters who survived into adulthood were evidently mixing socially with the students and staff. All except the second daughter, Anne, married, and to men whom they met through their College connections: Laetitia to John Kenrick; Harriet to John Reynell Wreford who enrolled as a divinity student in 1820; and Emma to James Carter who began as a lay student in the same year.¹³⁸ Organised recreational events were attended not only by students, tutors and their families, but also by local friends of the College. Writing to his father in 1829, William Rayner Wood recounted an evening of entertainment which had been provided by a travelling elocutionist, and noted that among those present were Anne Wellbeloved and 'two Miss Taylors,' from York, whose mother had been a pupil at the girls' school run by William's grandfather, William Wood.¹³⁹

It was Catharine Cappe, though, who provided the main stimulus to the development of a wider sphere in which mixed sociability could flourish around the College, both by making her house a centre of social gatherings and by drawing women into the orbit of College life. Through the close relationship which, as we have seen, she formed with staff and students Catharine was able to make contact with their female relatives, and she seems to have been especially eager to develop friendships with their sisters. She then actively sought to introduce these young women into College society by inviting them to visit York as her guests. In about 1806, for example, Mary Turner of Newcastle, sister of the mathematics tutor, went to stay with her. Mary met and socialised with several of the more promising divinity

¹³⁶Aikin, *Works of Barbauld*, i, p. xi; Henry Bright, 'A historical sketch of the Warrington Academy,' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 11 (1859-60), pp. 1-30, especially pp. 12-15; Herbert McLachlan, 'Warrington Academy: its history and influence,' *Cheetham Society Publications* (1943), especially pp. 83-9.

¹³⁷Gina Luria, 'Introduction,' to Mary Hays, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of Women* (London, 1974), p. 6.

¹³⁸Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, 'Appendix II: list of students educated at York under Charles Wellbeloved,' pp. 250-6.

¹³⁹William Rayner Wood to George William Wood, 6/12/1829,' MS Wood 5 (fols. 15-16) HMC.

students, meeting in the process her future husband, John Gooch Robberds.¹⁴⁰ Catharine's correspondence with Benjamin Mardon after he had left the College indicates a personal friendship with his sister, so she may have paid a visit to York similar to Mary Turner's.¹⁴¹ And in 1811 the two sisters of another divinity student, James Yates of Liverpool, were invited by Catharine to stay with her, although there is no evidence to show whether or not the offer was accepted.¹⁴² It is also likely that Mercy Benton, who in 1817 married William Turner, was introduced into the society around the College by Catharine, as she was first cousin to Catharine's step-children.¹⁴³

Catharine's endeavours to offer young women a route to participation in the College community can only be fully understood in the context of the more wide-ranging beliefs which she held about the importance of rational female education. Her autobiography, written in the closing decades of her life, charts the development of these beliefs and helps to illuminate the motives underpinning her actions. Reviewing her formative educational experiences from a standpoint informed by the progressive Unitarian attitude to women's education, she found them highly deficient. She did not explicitly make a comparison in the text of her autobiography, but she was certainly aware of the leading part which many Unitarian men, especially ministers, took in promoting their daughters' education when describing the attitude of her own father. She recollected that although he had been in many respects very liberal he had shared the common prejudices of the day against women's mental cultivation. 'If he saw in his daughter any desire of mental improvement, and some capacity for making progress in it,' she wrote, 'it is possible that he might think it the more necessary not to encourage but to restrain the growing propensity,' whilst he constantly lamented the 'scanty attainments' of her brother.¹⁴⁴ The formal schooling which she received consisted largely of tutoring in the acquisition of polite accomplishments.¹⁴⁵ After leaving school, she became increasingly frustrated at her 'total want of some well-directed, interesting and improving pursuit.' The

¹⁴⁰Mary Robberds, 'Recollections of a long life,' Turner Box, NLPS.

¹⁴¹Catharine Cappe to Benjamin Mardon, 30/30/1818, MS Evans 1. She also mentions Mardon's 'excellent sister' as one of 'those who have left us,' in a letter to Lant Carpenter, 5/10/1816, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

¹⁴²Catharine Cappe to Miss Yates, 11/9/1811, MS Misc 8 (fols. 63-4), HMC.

¹⁴³Charles Wellbeloved to George William Wood, 23/4/1817, MS Wood 1, fols 205-6; Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 20/8/1817, MS Lant Carpenter 1, both in HMC.

¹⁴⁴*Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 18-19. In 1816 she wrote to Lant Carpenter congratulating him on the plan which he had devised for educating his daughters in order that they would be fully competent to earn a living through teaching. Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 5/10/1816, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

¹⁴⁵*Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 38 and 45-9.

constant round of needlework was insufficient to occupy her mind, and her efforts at self-improvement through informative reading drew scorn and ridicule from her maternal aunts with whom she lived for a short while, as they, 'had a great horror of what they called learned ladies.'¹⁴⁶ Assimilation into the Unitarian community gave Catharine the confidence both to undertake herself a number of occupations aimed at social amelioration in the York area, and to develop her thesis on the importance to society at large of enabling and encouraging women to realise their intellectual potential and to engage in rational and useful activities. By inviting young women to visit her and using the special relationship which she had to the College to introduce them into its social sphere, Catharine sought to make a practical contribution to their education. Although women could not attend the College, she could give them a chance to experience the liberal, intellectual climate which surrounded it.

This inclusion of women in the College environment harmonized with the general tone of elite Unitarian culture. In the social activities with an educational dimension which grew up around individual congregations, their involvement alongside men was crucial for providing the elevated, rational atmosphere believed to be promotive of mental and moral improvement. As girls, they were provided with an academic education far superior to that generally offered to those in the middle classes, designed to equip them for participation in the rational social sphere. However, Unitarian women's function in their denomination was not only social. The changes in chapel administration during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which introduced vestry systems of government offered a wider base of stake-holding members a chance to have a say in the running of their chapel. Propertied single-women and widows were granted the right to wield a limited degree of formal authority, and by using their financial power to make donations, they were able to signal their importance in the congregation and commitment to Unitarianism in less formal ways too. It was within this milieu, which accepted that women might have a contribution to make, that Catharine Cappe was able to forge out roles for herself as an advocate of Unitarianism and a promoter of mixed sociability.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

Chapter Five

Crossing denominational boundaries. Quaker and Unitarian women in the wider Christian community: a case study of York

Introduction

So far, this regional study has been concerned with investigating the activities and experiences of Quaker and Unitarian women within the frameworks of beliefs, practices, institutions and networks which formed their respective denominational communities. Each community offered its members a circle of fellowship and intimacy, and represented a cultural space in which distinctive attitudes were articulated and patterns of behaviour authorized and encouraged. Denominational affiliation was for many an important aspect of their personal identity, but it was not, of course, the only one. Neither the Society of Friends nor Unitarianism existed as an isolated cell, despite the efforts of the former to live as loose from 'the world' as possible, and membership did not preclude the possibility of forging relationships with those of other faiths. In this final chapter, the ways in which Quaker and Unitarian women interacted with society outside the borders of their own denominations will be explored comparatively using a case study of York. Understanding how the profession of a particular faith mediated relations with people of other communities will illuminate more fully the possible meanings for women of their denominational attachment.

Men who belonged to York's Quaker and Unitarian communities might be drawn into association with those outside their denominations for a variety of reasons. Membership of civic, political, trading and commercial bodies, or of less formal networks directed towards leisure pursuits, for example, created opportunities for men from different religious backgrounds to come together from which women were largely excluded.¹ The key development which enabled women's inter-denominational communication and cooperation

¹See, for example: David Scott, *Quakerism in York, 1650-1720*, Borthwick Paper no. 80 (York, 1991); Sheila Wright, *Friends in York: the dynamics of Quaker revival, 1780-1860* (Keele, 1995), ch. 6; John Seed, "'A set of men powerful enough in many things': Rational Dissent and political opposition in England, 1770-1790," in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: rational dissent in eighteenth-century Britain*, (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 140-168; Catharine Cappe, *Discourses Chiefly on Devotional Subjects by the Late Reverend Newcome Cappe: to which are appended memoirs of his life* (York, 1805), p. xxxiv; David L. Wykes, 'Manchester College at York (1803-1840): its intellectual and cultural contribution,' *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 63 (1991), pp. 207-218; *Objects and Laws of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, with the Annual Report for 1823* (York, 1824), pp. 41-46.

during the period was the rapid expansion of non-sectarian philanthropic activity. From the late eighteenth century onwards, charitable endeavours flourished in York concerned both with the humanitarian reform of existing institutions and with the foundation of new societies designed to promote physical and mental, moral and spiritual amelioration. Historians looking at these ventures from both denominational and institutional perspectives have consistently noted the high level of cross-denominational collaboration which was achieved, with Anglican Evangelicals, Methodists, Independents, Friends and Unitarians coming together in the pursuit of common causes.² Contemporary evidence from both organisational records and personal writings indicates that women as well as men from these backgrounds united in support of causes with broadly Christian goals. That women joined together in shared activity should not, however, obscure the distinctive patterns of interaction which arose from their diverse denominational heritages. There were differences in the timing, extent and nature of Unitarian and Quaker women's integration into the wider Christian community, whilst sectarian beliefs shaped motives for participation. The surge of philanthropic endeavour which swept the country as a whole from the late eighteenth century onwards is well-known to have originated with the growing influence of evangelicalism on religious faith and practice among both Churchmen and dissenters, stressing the performance of good works as a fundamental indicator of a truly converted soul and injecting new zeal into the traditional tenet that charitable exertion was the duty of every Christian.³ Among both Friends and Unitarians conflicting attitudes were expressed towards evangelicalism. Individuals who engaged in philanthropy represented that section of each denomination which sought to negotiate the relationship of their traditional beliefs and practices to this self-proclaimed expression of 'serious' Christian piety. At the same time, philanthropy was also regarded by some women as a medium through which to articulate political aspirations, expressing, for example, their patriotism or commitment to the pursuit of civic virtue. It is also evident that women from both denominations believed there were special 'female' qualities which women could bring to philanthropic work, and were prompted by the desire to develop and legitimize these.

Religious background alone cannot explain the participation of either Quaker or Unitarian women in cross-denominational philanthropy. The number of women from each

²Katharine A. Webb, *One of the Most Useful Charities in the City: York Dispensary, 1788-1988*, Borthwick Paper no. 74 (York 1988), especially pp. 4-5; Sandra Lee Cumming, 'Evangelicals in York: the public activities of a group of leading Churchmen, c.1771-1865,' University of York MPhil. thesis, (1989); Wright *Friends in York*, especially pp. 69-77.

³David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s*, third ed (London 1995), pp. 70-1.

group who engaged in this work was tiny, so it is vital to attempt to discover what additional factors may have combined with religious affiliation and disposed them to activism.

Patterns of interaction and integration

In his pioneering study of women's philanthropy, Frank Prochaska highlights the way in which different denominational emphases can be detected cutting across the common religious impulse which animated charitable pursuits.⁴ Focussing comparatively on the activities of Quaker and Unitarian women in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philanthropic community of York reveals two particularly striking points of contrast. First, Unitarian women began to forge working links with those from other communions, especially evangelical Anglicans, much earlier than their Quaker counterparts displayed a similar willingness to join in shared undertakings. Secondly, for Unitarian women the acquaintance which they developed with women outside their denomination through philanthropic work did not mark the extent of their interaction. Relationships with their colleagues in philanthropy were reinforced by association in overlapping networks of social and business connections. Women Friends, on the other hand, appear to have been able to work alongside other women on specific charitable projects, yet to remain largely aloof from further assimilation into the wider Christian community.

The earliest cross-denominational philanthropic initiatives undertaken by women in York during our period were those spearheaded by the Unitarian Catharine Cappe and Faith Gray, an evangelical Anglican, in the 1780s which were directed towards the care of poor girls and women in education and employment. Born in 1751, Faith Hopwood had married William Gray, a solicitor and York's leading Anglican evangelical layman, in 1777. The excerpted manuscript remains of Faith's diary indicate that during the mid-1770s she underwent a gradual religious conversion, sufficiently alarming in the eyes of some of her relatives for them to warn her parents of the damage which her 'methodistical' tendencies might do to the family reputation.⁵ It is likely that her conversion took place under the influence of William Richardson, evangelical curate of St Michael-le-Belfrey church. Like William Gray, she attended Richardson's ministry before their marriage, and afterwards he was

⁴Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 1980), p. 39.

⁵Faith Gray's Diary: vol. 1, 1764-1810, p. 28, Gray's Court Papers, Acc. 5 D/1a, YCA. For her family background see the genealogical notes *ibid.*, pp. 7-19.

a regular visitor at their house along with the city's other leading evangelical Churchmen, including Richardson's younger brother, James, vicar choral of York Minster and rector of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, and John Graham who held the livings of St Saviours and St Mary's, Bishophill Senior.⁶ Precisely how and when Faith and Catharine met is unclear, but their philanthropic cooperation began in 1782 when Catharine (then Miss Harrison) and her mother settled in York.⁷

Together, the two women embarked on three reforming ventures during the 1780s, the first in October 1782. Disturbed by accounts of the ignorance and moral degradation of girls employed in a York hemp factory, they persuaded its proprietor to allow them to teach the children to read in the evenings. Several months of this experiment persuaded them that only by removing the girls completely from the factory environment and placing both their paid work and learning continually under the care of respectable women could moral reformation be effected. Thus in 1783 a spinning school was established, run by a mistress and superintended by a group of concerned ladies. There, girls were paid the same wages for their work as they had been in the factory but their physical, mental and moral welfare were also subject to scrutiny. Catharine took responsibility for overseeing the day to day operation of the school until 1796, when the increasing debility of Newcome Cappe meant that her ministrations were required elsewhere.⁸ Through the reputation which they gained in setting up the spinning school Catharine and Faith attracted the attention of the governors of York's Grey Coat School, an Anglican charity school for girls founded early in the century. In 1785 their help was solicited in reversing the disreputable moral condition of present and former pupils. Catharine's interest in the state of the school dated back to 1780, when during a visit to York she had been appalled by reports of its degenerate state, and especially by the rumour that nine girls educated there had since begun working as prostitutes. Having sought the women's help, protracted wrangles ensued with the repeated refusal of the governors actually to implement the reforms which they suggested. Only when scandalous behaviour by the

⁶Cumming, 'Evangelicals in York,' pp. 29-40; Faith Gray's Diary: vol. 1, 1764-1810,' *passim.*; Almira Gray, *Papers and Diaries of a York Family, 1764-1839* (London, 1927), especially pp. 35-7.

⁷Two of Catharine's maternal aunts lived in York, and she had been a regular visitor to the city since girlhood. When she and Mrs Harrison finally settled there, she noted, 'Next to my aunts, our nearest neighbours were, fortunately, Mr and Mrs Gray, whose hands and hearts are always ready to every good work.' Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 226.

⁸Catharine Cappe, *An Account of Two Charity Schools for the Education of Girls, and of a Female Friendly Society in York: Interspersed with Reflections on Charity Schools and Friendly Societies in General* (York, 1800), pp. 1-14; Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 226, 281-2; 'Faith Gray's Diary, vol. 1, 1764-1810', pp. 42-3.

schoolmaster came to light in 1787 was it agreed to hand over the running of the school to a Ladies' Committee, with power to execute such changes as they deemed necessary.⁹ The third enterprise pioneered by Catharine and Faith was a direct outgrowth of their educational schemes for improving the prospects of poor girls. In 1786 they established a Female Friendly Society to provide financial relief in sickness, confinement and old age to former pupils of the Grey Coat and spinning schools.

Catharine and Faith provided the brains and initial impetus behind these related institutional developments, but for the implementation and continuation of the projects they relied upon a wider network of female friends and acquaintances. No records survive for the spinning school, but those of the Grey Coat School indicate that Faith's influence in drawing activists into the venture was paramount. Catharine was the only dissenter on the Ladies' Committee of what was, after all, an Anglican foundation.¹⁰ Otherwise, the women who staffed it were Anglicans drawn from the families of local male worthies, many with links to Faith's social circle: the widowed and pious Lady Frances Anderson, for example, was a close friend of the Grays and godmother to two of their daughters; two sisters-in-law, Mrs 'Doctor Withers, wife of Thomas Withers, a leading York physician, and Mrs William Withers, whose husband served as Recorder of York, both figured frequently as members of the Gray circle, and Cordelia, a daughter of the latter couple, also sat on the Ladies' Committee; Jane Ewbank's father was a clergyman, and since before the time of their marriage her parents had been on close terms with Faith; Mrs Croft's husband, Robert, was prebendary of York Minster.¹¹

As a new institution without the sectarian heritage of the Grey Coat School, the Female Friendly Society reflected more clearly the Unitarian connections of its co-founder. Catharine's status after 1788 as the minister's wife may have given her additional influence with women from the elite of the St Saviourgate congregation. Honorary Members of the

⁹Cappe, *Account of Two Charity Schools*, pp. 16-50; Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 219, 226-7.

¹⁰In her account of the Anglican religious instruction which the girls there received, Catharine noted that she found it objectionable, but that 'peculiar circumstances' prevented her from making any reform in that area. This may have been a reference to her Unitarianism. Cappe, *Account of Two Charity Schools*, pp. 49-50 note

¹¹Biographical information and networks traced through: Cappe, *Account of Two Charity Schools*, list of original members of the Grey Coat School committee p. 29 note; Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 232, 'Faith Grays Diary, vol. 1, 1764-1810,' which includes numerous references to her friends and a brief memoir of Lady Anderson; p. 111, 'Ladies Committee Minute Book, 1790-1814,' Grey Coat School Records, YCT/GCS 1/1/1 BIHR; Webb, 'York Dispensary,' pp. 4-5; MS 'Biographical index of Yorkshire clergy,' York Minster Library

Society were 'ladies' who paid annual subscriptions and oversaw its management.¹² On a yearly basis two stewardesses were chosen from their number to take control of finances and organisation. Catharine worked as a stewardess from 1788 to 1796. Family ties played a major part in drawing Unitarian women both to subscribe and to play an active part in administration, with each of Catharine's unmarried stepdaughters, Mary and Anne, acting in the capacity of stewardess during the early 1800s. Later in the period, the Cappe sisters' cousin, Mercy Turner, wife of the Manchester College mathematics tutor, William, also joined the Society, and in 1826-7 she held the post of stewardess. From outside the Cappe family circle, Susanna Hotham, a niece of Newcome Cappe's predecessor at St Saviourgate, was an Honorary Member. So too was Eliza Crompton, whose husband Gilbert was one of York's leading bankers. She served as a stewardess between 1818 and 1820.¹³ It is likely, although impossible to ascertain, that some of the Unitarian women who patronised the Society also played a part in running the spinning school. A distinct Unitarian strand of input into this cluster of philanthropic ventures can therefore be traced, stimulated by Catharine's leading role.

It would be misleading to stress too far the separateness between the Unitarian and Anglican women working for these institutions. Despite their different denominational backgrounds, it is apparent that interaction took place between some women from these two groups which extended beyond their shared philanthropic activities and into familial relationships and social mixing. Catharine's influence may not, for example, have been wholly absent in encouraging Anglican women to participate in running the Grey Coat School. Several of those who sat on the Ladies' Committee moved within her family orbit. The wives of two local physicians, Dr Alexander Hunter, the founder of York Lunatic Asylum, and Dr Swainston, were original members of the Ladies' Committee. Both doctors belonged to the select band of learned and professional men who formed the literary discussion club active in York throughout the 1770s and 1780s of which Newcome Cappe was a founding figure and

¹²The York Female Friendly Society, founded in 1786, is an early example of such female self-help associations. As an institution with middle-class leadership and oversight, it was somewhat different from the 'box clubs' organized by working-class women themselves, which often held their meetings in public houses. See Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: women's lives in Georgian England* (London, 1998), pp. 254-6.

¹³'Rules and orders for the regulation of the York Female Friendly Society,' YCA Acc 50/1, which includes the signatures of Honorary Members, 1788 and 1796-7, providing women's often elusive first names; Cappe, *An Account of Two Charity Schools* (the copy of this book in York Public Library belonged to Faith Gray, and has the names of the stewardesses 1788-1830 inscribed in the back, although not by Faith herself, who died in 1826); John Graham, *Female Benefit Societies Recommended, or, the Necessity and Advantage of Foresight* (York, 1808); 'Hotham Pedigree,' in Mrs Welby's Donation, Mod. 4 to 24.81 (2) DWL; Gilbert and Eliza Crompton had three sons baptized at St Saviourgate between 1790 and 1793, see, 'St Saviourgate Register of Baptisms, 1724-1836,' RG4/3780, FRO.

which met weekly in rotation in one of the member's house.¹⁴ In addition, records of the School from the early nineteenth century indicate the presence on the Committee of a Mrs and a Miss Strickland, to whom Catharine was related.¹⁵ Catharine's mother was first cousin to Sir Rowland Winn of Nostel, whose daughter Eliza Laetitia married Sir George Strickland of Boynton. Evidently Catharine was on very close terms with the Stricklands, who seem to have sympathised with the emergent Unitarian movement of the 1770s. She paid them several visits during her early adulthood, including one shortly after Lindsey's resignation when, much to her comfort, they 'sincerely honoured Mr Lindsey's integrity.' They sought a tutor for their second son, George, among the local Rational Dissenting ministry, engaging Catharine's help in the matter in 1774 and ultimately placing him under the care of Newcome Cappe.¹⁶ The Stricklands on the Ladies' Committee were almost certainly George's wife and sister.¹⁷ Other Unitarian women also had connections to the Anglican evangelical elite. The Crompton family, whilst leading lights of St Saviourgate chapel - Gilbert's brother Joshua was a trustee of various chapel funds during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries - nevertheless forged close business links with the Grays. In 1795, William Gray joined as a partner with Gilbert Crompton in his family's banking firm.¹⁸ Relationships between Unitarian and Anglican women were cemented through mixing in social activities. For instance, Catharine and her stepdaughters appeared at Faith Gray's select tea parties. Similarly, after the commencement of the business partnership between William Gray and Gilbert Crompton, socialising took place between the families.¹⁹

This local network overlapped further with other networks of women connected to York but also belonging to wider circles of literary and reforming characters. Eliza Fletcher,

¹⁴This club illustrates how men formed cross-denominational links through shared literary and philosophical pursuits around the same time as women did so through philanthropy. Cappe's fellow-Unitarians in the club were the attorney John Hotham, nephew of his predecessor in the St Saviourgate pulpit, and during its later years his eldest son, Joseph Cappe, a physician. The Quaker physician William White was also a member, as were three Anglican clergymen. Cappe, *Discourses Chiefly on Devotional Subjects*, p. xxxiv.

¹⁵'Ladies' Committee Minute Book.'

¹⁶See *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1937) p. 2171; Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 9, 94, 170. In 1774 Catharine liaised between the Stricklands and William Turner of Wakefield, soliciting his recommendations for a tutor. See Catharine Harrison to William Turner, 30/1/1774, in *Letters to William Turner of Wakefield*, 12:44:12, DWL.

¹⁷George Strickland married in 1792, *Burke's Landed Gentry*, p. 2171.

¹⁸'Faith Gray's Diary: vol. 1, 1764-1810,' p. 94.

¹⁹'Faith Gray's Diary: vol. 1, 1764-1810,' pp. 35, 42, 95, 102. The devastating editing of this diary makes it impossible to determine the true extent of the interaction which took place on a social scale. For example, whole years are sometimes summarised in one or two sentences.

who as the wife of a reforming Scots lawyer became a key figure in Edinburgh literary coterie of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and a friend of Anna Barbauld,²⁰ was born near York in 1770. In girlhood she formed a close friendship with the Ewbanks of Bolton Percy, and it seems very likely that before her marriage she also became acquainted with both Faith Gray and Catharine Cappe. At any rate, when she afterwards returned to York visiting them formed part of her itinerary. In 1797 and 1803, for example, she took dinner and breakfast respectively at the Grays' house.²¹ Her friendship with Catharine seems to have been based on greater intimacy, as it is evident that Fletcher lodged with her during several visits to York, such as in 1804 and 1814.²² Eliza Fletcher's association with the Unitarian community in York deepened in 1808, when it was decided to enroll her son, Miles, as a lay student at Manchester College under the belief that he would be subject to a more rigorous regime of learning and discipline than the Scottish education system offered.²³ Indeed, it is possible that the Fletchers came to know and approve of the work of Wellbeloved and the College through their friendship with Catharine, who undertook important roles as a social hostess bringing together members of the various networks to which she belonged. This is well-illustrated in Jane Ewbank's account of an afternoon on which she accompanied Eliza Fletcher to a gathering at Catharine's house in 1804. Unitarians, female philanthropists and literary figures mingled: 'The party we met there consisted of Mr and Mrs Welby,²⁴ Mr Kere,²⁵ Mr Simpson,²⁶ Miss Strickland & Mrs Green²⁷ ... The afternoon was pleasant and the conversation sometimes very interesting.'²⁸ For her part, Eliza Fletcher may have been the medium through which Catharine was introduced to two other women connected to the

²⁰[Eliza Fletcher,] *Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher, with Letters and Other Family Memorials* (Edinburgh, 1875).

²¹'Faith Gray's Diary: vol. 1, 1764-1810,' pp. 100, 123.

²²Journal 1803-5, of Miss Ewbank of York, 9 September 1803-11 September 1805,' p. 164, MS 9481, NLS; 'Eliza Fletcher's Autobiography,' f.71.v, MS3758, NLS.. Thanks to Jane Rendall for introducing me to these sources.

²³*Ibid.*; 'List of students educated at Manchester College, York, under Reverend Charles Wellbeloved,' in Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, 'Appendix 2,' pp. 250-6..

²⁴Charles and Ann Wellbeloved.

²⁵Rev. Hugh Kerr, a member of the Church of Scotland and graduate of Glasgow University who was Wellbeloved's first assistant tutor at Manchester College, where he taught classics, mathematics and natural philosophy from 1804 to 1807.

²⁶Not a certain identification, but this might be a College lay student enrolled at the time, J. W. Simpson.

²⁷See below.

²⁸Journal of Miss Ewbank,' p. 164.

Scottish literary scene with whom she became close friends, Robina Craig Millar and Margaret Cullen, daughters of Dr William Cullen²⁹ who moved to York in 1798.³⁰ The York network had links too with the literary networks gathering in the Lakes in the early nineteenth century. In 1810 Catharine and her stepdaughters paid a visit to the Cullen sisters who were then living in the area.³¹ The main medium of contact between the York and Lakes circles, though, was Mrs Green, mentioned above as a participant in one of Catharine's social gatherings and who was likewise a member of Faith Gray's social circle.³² She divided her time between Ambleside, where she lived in the summer, and York. For acquaintances from York visiting the Lakes, she provided a source of introduction to the literary luminaries there. In 1803, for example, she introduced Jane Ewbank to the Scottish educationalist and novelist, Elizabeth Hamilton.³³ When Charles Wellbeloved and his daughter Laetitia spent two months in the Lake District in 1815, Mrs Green introduced them into the circle around the Wordsworths.³⁴

Women Friends did not emerge as active members of York's philanthropic community until the second decade of the nineteenth century, and at no point during the period did they lend their support to any of the three female-focussed initiatives begun by Unitarian and Anglican women in the 1780s. Furthermore, although Quaker women's subsequent involvement did bring them into greater contact with their fellow-activists from other denominational backgrounds, there is no evidence to suggest that they became integrated socially into the overlapping personal networks which reinforced the shared charitable interests of Unitarians and Anglican women, instead remaining firmly embedded in their own

²⁹William Cullen (1710-1790), physician and scientist, held the Chair of Medicine at Edinburgh University from 1773. At the time of Catharine's acquaintance with his daughters, Robina was the widow of John Millar, son of the Glasgow University professor of the same name, and Margaret was an author.

³⁰Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 296-7. Whilst staying with the Lindseys in London in 1801, Catharine met up with Margaret Cullen who was visiting relatives in Richmond. Catharine Cappe to Charles Wellbeloved, 1/5/1801, Miscellaneous small donations, 12:71:14, DWL.

³¹Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 371.

³²Faith Gray's Diary: vol. 2, 1811-1826,' p. 37, Gray's Court Papers, Acc. 5, D/1b, YCA.

³³Journal of Miss Ewbank,' p. 13.

³⁴Diary of Laetitia Wellbeloved, 10/9/1815 to 6/11/1815,' MS Misc 3, HMC; Charles Wellbeloved told George William Wood in a letter dated 14/11/1815, that he had just returned from the Lakes, and, 'Laetitia returns with Mrs Green tomorrow,' MS Wood 1, fols. 166-7, HMC. Dorothy Wordsworth sent a scathing portrayal of Mrs Green to Catharine Clarkson, wife of the abolitionist Thomas. Mrs Green had apparently refused to subscribe to the publication of William Wordsworth's *Excursion*, on the grounds that she could borrow it from a circulating library in York. Recounting the incident Dorothy satirically described, 'our summer neighbour, Mrs Green (a widow with 1600£ per annum of whom you must have heard us speak - a blue-stocking Dame).' Ernest de Selincourt, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: the middle years, 1812-1820*, second ed. (Oxford, 1970), Part 2, p. 184.

sectarian networks.

As Sheila Wright has observed, the involvement of men from York Meeting in local philanthropic organisations began towards the end of the eighteenth century, when a number of 'weighty' Friends began to demonstrate a readiness to work alongside those of other faiths on projects designed to reform lives and relieve suffering.³⁵ They stepped forward, for example, in support of the York Dispensary which was founded in 1788. Although the Dispensary was a foundation undertaken by men, Katherine Webb has stressed that many of those who took a leading part in its establishment were connected with the circle of reforming women which centred on Catharine Cappe and Faith Gray.³⁶ It is evident that these were drawn from the Anglican side of the network - William Gray and the Withers brothers were key founders - but the backing which the institution received quickly took on an interdenominational hue. Two Friends, William Tuke and John Fothergill, appear on the 1791 subscribers list, and by 1803 the former was a Director. From St Saviourgate chapel, Gilbert Crompton and the substantial gentleman John Rawdon, subscribed, as did Catharine Cappe and Benedicta Hotham. Indeed, the appearance of Catharine deserves mention as she was a married woman at this point yet Newcome Cappe did not subscribe.³⁷ Around the same time, men Friends also demonstrated a readiness to use their Society's financial leverage effectively to negotiate for themselves a role within local charitable institutions. In June 1792, Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting voted to offer a donation of forty pounds to York County Hospital on the condition that, 'the Governors agree to admit one Friend at a time nominated by this Meeting to the Privilege of Governor and of recommending Patients.'³⁸ Later that year, William Tuke was appointed a Governor of the hospital.³⁹ The Society for the Prevention of Vice and Profaneness, established in 1809, offered another new sphere for predominantly male cooperation, although its emphasis on the eradication of prostitution encouraged a number of elite married women belonging to the evangelical Anglican camp to subscribe alongside their husbands.⁴⁰ Catharine was again a subscriber, along with her fellow-Unitarians John Rawdon, Robert Driffield, merchant, and Charles Wellbeloved. William Tuke was joined by his sons,

³⁵Wright, *Friends in York*, especially pp. 71-2.

³⁶Webb, 'One of the most useful charities in the city,' pp. 4-10.

³⁷'York Dispensary printed reports: list of subscribers, 1791-2,' Acc 27/60, YCA.

³⁸'Minute Book of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1782-1815,' mf 161, BIHR.

³⁹'General Court Book, 1742-1820,' Governors' minutes, p. 121, YCH 1/1/2/1, BIHR.

⁴⁰Faith and William Gray, William and Mrs Richardson.

Henry and John, and other leading York Friends: Lindley Murray, Thomas Priestman and David Doeg. Henry Tuke made a donation of twenty guineas to the SPVP from the profits of his *Duties of Religion and Morality* (1807). The preface to the book made clear the inter-denominational impulse now informing Tuke's work. He expressed the hope that it would find a readership beyond the Society of Friends, for whom it had originally been intended, observing that he had, 'not apprehended it necessary to inculcate any precepts or duties but those of which the propriety is admitted by Christians in general,' in the work.⁴¹

By the early nineteenth century, then, some of the most influential male members of York Monthly Meeting had clearly begun to reassess the configuration of their Society in relation to the wider Christian community, and were making decisive moves to break through the barriers created by Quaker 'peculiarity' and forge active links in support of common causes with members of other faiths. The first, somewhat tentative, steps towards similar cooperation in local philanthropic ventures by women Friends can be traced to 1812-13, and the establishment of two charitable organisations in York, the Auxiliary British and Foreign Bible Society and the British Girls' School.

The British and Foreign Bible Society, founded in 1804, represented the early nineteenth-century endeavour *par excellence* in inter-denominational fellowship and cooperation. Laying aside their greater or lesser differences on matters of Scriptural interpretation and united by their faith in the power of the Bible as *the* medium for the regeneration of humankind, evangelical Anglicans and Dissenters together embarked on a project to distribute Bibles 'without note or comment,' as the Society's rubric confirmed, to the poor at home and the heathen overseas. Nationally, it became the largest voluntary organisation established under evangelical auspices; in the first twenty years of its existence, nearly £1,000,000 was spent on printing and distributing the Scriptures in 130 languages. Local Auxiliary Societies began to spring up in the 1810s to facilitate the distribution of Bibles among the urban poor by volunteer home visitors.⁴² York's Auxiliary Bible Society was established in January, 1812 and, whilst Anglican evangelicals predominated on its committees and subscription lists, the presence of both Unitarians and, especially, Friends is also striking. William and Henry Tuke were appointed members of the first lay committee, and the latter was a speaker at the founding meeting. He signalled unequivocally to other

⁴¹Henry Tuke, *The Duties of Religion and Morality, as Inculcated in the Holy Scriptures: with Preliminary and Occasional Observations* (York, 1807), p. vii.

⁴²On the BFBS see: Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: ecumenical stirrings in pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1831* (London, 1983), Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 66; pp. 80-146; Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: the evangelical impact on the Victorians* (London, 1976), pp. 136-7.

'serious' Christian activists in the local community his belief in a wider Christian fellowship which transcended sectarian boundaries, and his commitment to work with them for its cultivation:

May we not compare the various sects to the different tribes of ancient Israel? We, like them may have different views and separate interests; but we acknowledge one God and one Lord, even our Lord Jesus Christ ... The spirit of brotherly love has been greatly promoted by the union of all sects in the establishment of the Bible Society - it has, I am persuaded, already lessen and will still more lessen, the differences which exist among us, and happily soften those asperities, which have too often arisen from the defence of our peculiar opinions.

Charles Wellbeloved echoed Tuke's sentiments in proposing a vote of thanks for, 'the very eloquent addresses of my brethren (for I feel myself authorised to call them my brethren, by the spirit of the Institution).'⁴³ Subscriptions flowed in during the following months. Twenty-nine Friends subscribed among whom were seven women, including both the female ministers then serving in York Meeting, Ann Alexander and Isabel Richardson. In addition, there was a collective subscription from the teachers and pupils of the Friends' Girls' School. The influence of the Tuke family is evident: along with its satellites - the Alexanders and Martha Fletcher - it accounted for over a third of Quaker subscribers. Ann Alexander was the only married woman from either the Quaker or Unitarian community to subscribe in her own right. There were sixteen Unitarian subscribers of whom four were women: Catharine Cappe; her stepdaughters, Mary and Anne; and Elinor Hotham, an elderly spinster, niece of Newcome Cappe's predecessor, and a generous supporter of Manchester College following its arrival in York.⁴⁴ The impact which the College itself had on the degree of Unitarian support registered by the Bible Society in York cannot be underestimated: the three tutors, Wellbeloved, Kenrick and Turner all subscribed, as did five lay students.⁴⁵

A small number of women from the elite of both the local Quaker and Unitarian communities thus began to subscribe to organisations which were explicitly inter-denominational in design. An important distinction needs to be made, though, between the

⁴³*Report of the Proceedings and Resolutions at a Meeting Held the 29th January 1812 at the Formation of an Auxiliary Bible Society, for the City of York and its Vicinity*, (York, 1812).

⁴⁴Elinor Hotham became an annual subscriber of two guineas to Manchester College in 1804, and on her death in 1836 at the age of ninety-seven she bequeathed five hundred pounds to the institution. "Manchester Academy Cash Book, 1786-1812," MS MNC Misc 63, HMC; 'Manchester College, York, Ledger B,' MS MNC Misc 64/11, HMC; 'St Saviourgate Register of Burials, 1794-1836,' RG4/3780, FRO.

⁴⁵Subscription lists compiled from those published in the *York Herald*, 1/2/1812, 8/2/1812, 15/2/1812, 23/2/1812, 7/3/1812 and 14/3/1812.

two possible forms which philanthropic exertion could take, namely, contributing to a fund on the one hand, and involvement in the practical implementation of its schemes on the other. Whilst the former did send out important signals of personal interest in and support for particular causes, it was the latter which might actually demand working directly alongside those of other denominations.

Unitarian women, as we have seen, collaborated with others in philanthropic ventures from the 1780s; women Friends' initiation into this sphere began, and very cautiously, in 1812-1813 with the establishment of the York British Girls' School. The school, 'for the education of poor girls upon an improved plan,' was the brainchild of Priscilla Tuke.⁴⁶ Priscilla had married Henry Tuke's eldest son and business partner, Samuel, in 1810. Although the idea for the institution was conceived in early 1812, a lengthy interval of planning and fundraising ensued before it finally opened in July 1813. In administrative terms, the British School was an exclusively Quaker foundation, and was funded by subscriptions collected principally from among the members of York Meeting. Its organisational framework bore some similarities to that of the York Friends' Girls' School discussed in chapter three above, in the sense that women and men Friends worked together to put the plan into operation, but the day to day running of the school was in the hands of an all-female committee. Examination of the women who held committee posts again reveals the dominant position of the Tukes. Priscilla Tuke was joined by her husband's sisters Esther and Maria, and there was substantial input from the family of John Tuke, land surveyor, and his wife Sarah. Their four daughters, Sarah, Rebecca, Elizabeth and Ann, and Sarah senior's sister, Mary Mildred, were all committee members during the early years of the school's existence. Other leading figures came predominantly from the upper echelons of the Meeting: Alice Horner, for example, came from the prominent Birkbeck banking family of Settle and her husband Benjamin was a dentist; Ann Priestman and Hannah Galilee were the daughter and wife respectively of tanners.⁴⁷

What made the school different from the other activities focussed around the Monthly Meeting in which these women had previously joined together, and which hinted at the germination of a less exclusive identification with the Society was that the objects of its concern were non-Friends. By keeping the administration of the British School solely under their care women Friends demonstrated that they were not yet willing to take the step towards

⁴⁶Charles Tylor (ed.), *Samuel Tuke: his life, work and thoughts* (London, 1900), p. 46.

⁴⁷'York British Girls' School: Minute Book of Female Subscribers, 1812-1822,' Acc 118/254 YCA. cross-reference with 'York Monthly Meeting List of Members,' mf BIHR.

direct cooperation in philanthropic organisations with their peers from other denominations. Nevertheless, there are indications that running the school did become a means of introduction into the wider local community of female philanthropists for some of the women connected with it. In 1813 Ann Springman, a young schoolteacher from Halifax trained by Joseph Lancaster, visited York in order to assist the evangelical clergyman John Graham in the establishment of an Anglican school along Lancastrian lines. During her stay in York, Springman became acquainted with the women Friends running the British school through their shared educational interests, as well as spending time with Catharine Cappe, who was evidently known to the Tuke women.⁴⁸

It has been suggested that women Friends in York did not step beyond the sphere of philanthropic opportunity offered by their Monthly Meeting until 1820, with the foundation of the Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Female Servants' Ladies Committee.⁴⁹ The development actually took place, however, six years earlier, in 1814, when female visiting committees were established to oversee the welfare of the women patients at York County Hospital and York Lunatic Asylum. The first woman Friend to undertake shared visiting duties was Alice Horner, who in 1814 accompanied Robina Craig Millar onto the wards. Others followed: Elizabeth Mason, wife of John, linen draper; Henry Tuke's elder daughter, Esther, in 1816; Ann Priestman and Rebecca Tuke, daughter of John, in 1817, and Rebecca Tuke's sister, Elizabeth, in 1819. At the Hospital, women Friends took on a share of responsibility, although they were less prominent there than at the Asylum. Ann Priestman visited in 1815 and 1817, whilst Priscilla Tuke was in regular attendance between 1817 and 1821.⁵⁰ As with other areas in which special duties were demanded of them, it was women Friends from the more influential, economically comfortable, families in the Monthly Meeting who came forward..

Unitarian women also gave their services to these two institutional committees. Indeed. Catharine Cappe spearheaded the campaign to persuade the hospitals' authorities to allow so-called 'Lady Visitors' onto the female wards of their institutions, and she became a vigorous exponent in print of the practice. In 1813, firmly convinced of the need for Lady

⁴⁸Maria Tuke to Esther Tuke, 31/1/1813, and A. Springman to Priscilla Tuke, 12/3 1814, both in Tuke 30, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

⁴⁹Wright, *Friends in York*, p. 72.

⁵⁰For Lady Visitors at York County Hospital, see 'General Court Book, 1742-1820,' YCH 1 1/2/1 and 'Minutes of Court of Governors, 1820-66,' YCH 1/1/2/2, for those at the Lunatic Asylum, see, 'Lady Visitors Report Book, 1814-1830,' BOO 1/8/4/3, and 'The Lady Visitors' Book York Lunatic Asylum, BOO 1/8/4/2, all in BIHR.

Visitors in the wake of a scandal at the County Hospital, but equally aware that without some form of inducement to offer she had little chance of breaking through the prejudices of the Governors, She enlisted the help of 'a considerable number of ladies of fortune and respectability' in Yorkshire. She wrote asking if they would be willing to make it known that they were prepared to become subscribers to the Hospital, on the express condition that Lady Visitors be admitted. More than fifty agreed, and in November of that year the first Lady Visitors were appointed, and the Asylum followed suit the following year.⁵¹ The records of the Lady Visitors appointed to these two institutions show considerable overlap with the Anglican-Unitarian network which was responsible for running the Grey Coat and spinning schools and the Female Friendly Society, with Unitarian women being some of the most dedicated visitors during the period under discussion here. Catharine and her stepdaughters regularly attended at the Hospital, with Mary, the eldest sister, serving every year between 1816 and 1829. Mercy Turner also undertook duties there each year from 1821 until her removal to Halifax in 1827, and Eliza Crompton showed similar commitment between 1817 and 1830. Family connections to the Hospital may have acted to give Mrs Crompton an added interest, as her brother-in-law Joshua was a Trustee. Interestingly among Unitarian women, there is no discernable overlap between those visiting the Hospital and the Asylum. The Unitarian presence at the latter was maintained largely by two of the Wellbeloved sisters, Laetitia (Mrs Kenrick after 1821) and Emma. Their involvement reflects the deep and active interest which their father took in the Asylum. In the wake of the scandals which led to its reform in 1813-15 Charles Wellbeloved served as a governor, and he was chair of the Committee of Governors for over twenty years.⁵² Laetitia in particular was something of a mainstay in the capacity of Lady Visitor during the 1820s. There was no appearance by women of the Cappe family until 1833, when Catharine Bell, daughter of the married Cappe sister Sarah Bell, served as a visitor, but it seems rather tenuous to link her involvement too closely to that of the earlier generations of activists. Why Catharine, Mary and Anne Cappe should have chosen not to attend to this branch of visiting is by no means clear, especially as Catharine devotes some space in her autobiography to detailing the improvements which had been effected in mental health care in York since the turn of the century.⁵³

From the early 1820s onwards, there is also some evidence that Quaker and Unitarian

⁵¹Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 415-6; 'General Court Book, 1742-1820: Minutes of Governors' Meetings,' p. 224.

⁵²Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, pp. 137-40.

⁵³Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 416-20.

women were involved in the activities of the York Auxiliary Ladies' Bible Society. In 1817, faced with financial depression, the British and Foreign Bible Society needed to exploit all its available resources, and the informal associations of women which gathered around local auxiliaries offered a promising source of untapped support. For their part, women supporters felt that, given the chance to expand, their associations could save the Society from financial ruin. That year, the nationwide organisation of so-called Ladies' Auxiliary Bible Societies to coordinate the female home visiting in poor areas began, and accelerated rapidly in following years.⁵⁴ York's Ladies' Auxiliary Bible Society was founded in 1821,⁵⁵ and almost immediately Priscilla Tuke was active as a district visitor, as the letters between her sisters-in-law Maria Tuke and Esther Tuke Priestman testify.⁵⁶ From the Unitarian community, one of Charles Wellbeloved's daughters, although it has not been possible to trace which, was for a long period secretary to the Ladies' Bible Society.⁵⁷

Denomination, philanthropy and the place of women

By 1820, leading women members of the Quaker and Unitarian communities in York were acting alongside both one another and evangelical women of other denominations in running the female branches of local voluntary societies and charitable institutions. Yet this cooperation in the pursuit of common concerns does not, of course, imply that they were motivated to undertake the work by identical beliefs and interests. In this section, I aim to explore the reasons behind Quaker and Unitarian women's patterns of involvement in inter-denominational philanthropic ventures. Denominational heritage, in terms of both beliefs and practices, contributed in many and complex ways to shape the interaction of female adherents with wider society. It was not simply the case, though, that women acted solely from identification with their religious community. When women from both Quaker and Unitarian backgrounds crossed the boundary which separated their particular church from others, they did so with the conviction that *as women* they had something special to offer.

The profound impact which evangelicalism had on drawing an increasingly influential

⁵⁴Martin, *Evangelicals United*, pp. 114-6.

⁵⁵*York Herald*, 20/10/1821.

⁵⁶Maria Tuke to Esther Priestman, endorsed 1821, Tuke 25; Maria Tuke to Esther Priestman, 12/1821, Tuke 30, both in Tuke Papers, BIHR.

⁵⁷Kenrick, *Memoir of Wellbeloved*, pp. 130-1.

section of the Society of Friends out of its established position of self imposed semi-isolation and into the wider Christian community during the early nineteenth century has been well-documented by historians, so need not be rehearsed in detail here. Briefly, Friends' traditional humanitarianism stimulated them to take a leading part in the anti-slavery campaigns of the late eighteenth century onwards. Through this work they were brought into cooperative contact with the 'serious' of other faiths and, as James Walvin writes, 'In this and in other reforming conscience, Quakers were carried along by the rising tide of evangelicalism.'⁵⁸ Friends were not unanimous in their acceptance of evangelical doctrine with its stress on the supremacy of Scripture as the revealed word of God, and some retained instead the Quietist conviction that the Inner Light alone could be a sufficient source of revelation. By the 1830s and 1840s, though, the evangelical wing was firmly in the ascendant, demonstrating a vigorous commitment to philanthropic endeavour, and assimilated into the interdenominational evangelical Christian community.⁵⁹ A couple of contrasting examples from Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting will serve to illustrate the link between evangelical inclinations and willingness to support cross-denominational ventures. Robert Jowitt, a prosperous woolstapler belonging to Brighouse Monthly Meeting, was recorded as a minister in 1820. His friends included some of the leading evangelical Quakers of the early nineteenth century, men like Joseph John Gurney of Norwich and William Forster of Tottenham.⁶⁰ Whilst he did not share the ultra-evangelical views which eventually caused five members of his family to split from the Meeting in the late 1830s, Jowitt was well-known to espouse evangelical Quakerism.⁶¹ The records which he kept of personal expenditure reveal a steadily growing munificence towards all manner of philanthropic concerns. In 1816 he subscribed to seven separate organisations; by 1833 he was making thirty-nine subscriptions and donations to a variety of worthy causes and needy individuals.⁶² In contrast, the Guisborough minister, Ann Coning,

⁵⁸James Walvin, *The Quakers: money and morals* (London, 1997), pp. 127-8.

⁵⁹As Elizabeth Isichei notes, 'All the prominent Victorian Quaker philanthropists were evangelicals.' The mutually reinforcing relationship which existed between Friends evangelicalism, philanthropic work, and integration into the wider Christian community is highlighted by David Bebbington's observation that by the 1830s and 1840s, 'Sharing in interdenominational work through agencies such as the Bible Society and the British and Foreign School Society, the Quakers had become part of the Evangelical world.' Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford, 1970), p. 214; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 155-6.

⁶⁰See, for example, Benjamin Seebohm (ed.), *Memoirs of William Forster* (2 vols., London, 1865), i, p. 42.

⁶¹The members of the Jowitt family who resigned or were disowned were Robert's cousin, the minister Maria Arthington, his son John and daughters Rachel and Elizabeth, and John's wife Deborah. Mark Ellison, 'Further thoughts on Leeds Friends and the Beaconite controversy,' *JFHS*, 57(1992-3), pp. 57-75.

⁶²'Robert Jowitt's Private Ledger,' Papers of Robert Jowitt and Sons, BLUL.

displayed quite opposite tendencies. She was disturbed by the primary place which she believed evangelical Friends assigned to the Scriptures over the Spirit as the standard of faith and practice, and in the early 1830s she assisted in the circulation of an unauthorised edition of the works of John Wilbur, the leading figure in Quietist American Quakerism. Around the same period, she not only gave up meetings of the Bible Society, to which she had initially been friendly, but was also cautioning other Friends to do the same, fearing the undue emphasis which Bible Society leaders placed on the power of the Scriptures to lead to salvation at the expense of inward spiritual guidance. On one occasion, she entered Guisborough men's Meeting for discipline to warn them, 'lest they should be carried away by the flowing exaggerated speeches made in [Bible Society] meetings, ... the danger of being drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel, and by such exposure be led to a compromise of principles.' For Coning, evangelicalism and the attendant bonding which it had encouraged with other denominations through philanthropic work posed a threat to the purity of Friends' distinctive beliefs and practices.⁶³

Evangelicalism, as Sheila Wright has shown in detail, made early inroads into the beliefs of York Monthly Meeting members with far-reaching consequences. 'The origins of what became a national revival, had its intellectual roots in York Meeting,' when in the early years of the nineteenth century Henry Tuke and Lindley Murray began critically to analyse Quakers' established beliefs about the relative import of Scripture and Spirit in light of current evangelical thinking. Tentatively, and with none of the attendant controversy which was to surround later evangelical exponents within the Society, they began to espouse a different form of Quakerism in which an unprecedented degree of stress was placed on the importance of the Scriptures. By closing the doctrinal gap which existed between themselves and evangelicals in other denominations, the former were released from the isolation of the eighteenth century and the foundations of united action in support of moral and humanitarian causes with broadly Christian aims were laid.⁶⁴ After the publication of his *Duties of Religion and Morality*, Henry Tuke told a Newcastle Friend that the book had, 'been favourably spoken of by some members of the Church of England, and particularly by the most respectable clergymen in the city,' almost certainly a reference to the circle of Evangelical clergy centred on the Richardsons and

⁶³See Ann Coning to George and Mary Crossfield, 4/3/1833, Port. 17 (49) and Ann Coning to anon. [possibly J. J. Gurney] 21-22/5/1832, Port. 20 (153) both in FHL. It is evident from the former letter that George Crossland had published John Wilbur's works without the sanction of the Second Day Morning Meeting, fearing that they would be expurgated if the Society's evangelical hierarchy had a hand in the publication. Ann Coning approved of the move, and helped to distribute the work to Friends in Yorkshire.

⁶⁴Wright, *Friends in York*, pp. 21-30.

John Graham.⁶⁵

York women Friends' participation in inter-denominational philanthropy was facilitated by the influence of evangelicalism on the Meeting. Their involvement followed the initial breaching of the boundaries between the Society and other churches by men Friends on the one hand, and the expansion of local philanthropic societies and institutions to offer active roles to women on the other. At the same time, though, I would suggest that the origins of women's activism can be traced to the distinctive gender heritage, in terms of beliefs and practices, of the Society of Friends itself. As chapters one and three of this thesis have argued, the separate women's Meetings for discipline reflected and enshrined Friends' understanding that women might have needs and concerns which were distinct from those of men, and which could be most properly and effectively met by the ministrations of other women. Female Friends of deep spiritual experience could and did exercise care over their brethren as well as sisters, but the sphere of official responsibility for women was primarily perceived to be among those of their own sex. This perspective was reflected in the practices adopted at Friends' institutions. At both Ackworth and Gildersome Schools, for example, women Friends were appointed to inspect regularly the physical, mental and moral state of the girls being educated there and the condition of their dormitories and clothing.⁶⁶ Most significant for the subsequent involvement of York women Friends in non-denominational philanthropy, however, were the developments which took place following the foundation of the Retreat. Established in 1796, the Retreat was conceived by William Tuke to provide a Quaker environment in which mentally ill Friends could be cared for. It was a pioneering venture in the humane treatment of people with mental illnesses, prompted by the death of a young Quaker woman from Leeds in York Lunatic Asylum, where local friends had been denied access to her during her internment. Several months after the Retreat opened, its (all-male) committee decided that, 'a benefit would arise from some women Friends visiting the House - occasionally but not seldomer than once a week,' to look into the condition of female patients. Three women were to serve concurrently as visitors, one of whom would be replaced each month.⁶⁷ Comparing the names of women Friends who served as visitors to the Retreat with those who attended to that work at the Lunatic Asylum and the County Hospital between the foundation of the Ladies' Visiting Committees and 1830, reveals that everyone in the latter

⁶⁵Henry Tuke to George Richardson, 1/12/1807, Tuke 4D, Tuke Papers, BIHR.

⁶⁶See p. 161 above, for discussion of women visitors at the schools

⁶⁷'Committee Minutes, 25/7/1796,' Retreat Archives, A/3/1, BIHR.

group with the sole exception of Esther Tuke had experience of visiting gained through service at the Retreat.⁶⁸ The earlier work will have given them a certain degree of knowledge and expertise regarding care of the sick which prompted them to offer their help at the Hospital and Asylum. Underlying this impulse, though, was the sense, enshrined within Friends sectarian beliefs and practices, that such work represented a perfectly appropriate dimension of the duties and responsibilities of women, a sense which also informed women Friends' subsequent work on the Ladies' Committees of, for example, the Auxiliary Bible Society and the Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Female Servants. Philanthropic work outside the Society became a natural extension of the established roles which women Friends had performed within it.

As with Friends, the involvement of Unitarian women in local inter-denominational philanthropy was both a general reflection of wider sectarian trends and a particular expression of the belief that women had particular duties and responsibilities to fulfil in the wider community. Catharine Cappe, through her published and private writings, articulated vigorous arguments in favour of both Unitarians and female participation in philanthropic ventures alongside members of other faiths. Her remarks cannot, of course, be regarded as the universal declaration of Unitarian women's motivation for engaging in such work, but offer a valuable and detailed insight into the ways in which women could find potent sources of empowerment in their religious beliefs. Besides using theological arguments, Catharine drew on other discourses which had a strong influence in Unitarian heritage to advance her claims in favour of women's active involvement in society, most notably in developing a female-focussed language of civic duty and public virtue.

The grounds of Unitarian involvement in inter-denominational philanthropy during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been subjected to little scrutiny.⁶⁹ In recent study of Unitarian philanthropy, G. M. Ditchfield contends that it was characterised by the separateness which it maintained from the charitable activities of other faiths. Unitarians' distrust of the state was matched by suspicion of major institutional charities such as schools and hospitals, and manifested itself in a general antipathy between Unitarians and the governing bodies of Anglican foundations. As a result, Ditchfield argues, Unitarians

⁶⁸Retreat visitors names listed in *ibid.*

⁶⁹Discussions of Unitarian philanthropy tend to focus on the work of the denominational Domestic Mission Movement begun in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, which sent trained Unitarian missionaries into working-class homes to spread rational religion, education and cultural edification through personal contact. See: John Seed, 'Unitarians, political economy, and the antinomies of liberal culture in Manchester, 1830-1850,' *Social History*, 7 (1982) pp. 3-15; Howard M. Wach, 'Unitarian philanthropy and cultural hegemony in comparative perspective: Manchester and Boston, 1827-1848,' *Journal of Social History* (1993), pp. 539-557.

increasingly channelled their philanthropic energies through denominational fundraising initiatives such as the Unitarian Fund.⁷⁰ This judgement does not, however, correspond with the pattern traced above of Unitarian philanthropy in York. Focussing on local activities suggests a more harmonious picture of interaction, in which Unitarians cooperated with other committed Christians on non-denominational ventures, than that presented by highlighting the implementation of national denominational projects. Not until the 1830s had Trinitarian animosity towards Unitarians heightened to such an extent as to render this cooperation impossible.⁷¹ Analysis of Catharine Cappe's writings on philanthropy indicates that her arguments and actions in support of inter-denominational collaboration evolved as a result of exposure to two main strands of belief. First, and more importantly, she drew on Enlightenment humanitarianism as it was expressed in the emergent Unitarian movement of the 1770s and 1780s. Secondly, during the early nineteenth century she began to engage critically with the challenge posed by evangelicalism to rational religion, and identified philanthropy as a sphere in which the practical virtues of each theological system were exposed to examination.

Enlightenment humanitarianism is generally recognised as the intellectual source of Unitarian reform activism during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As John Seed observes, Unitarianism stressed the Christian duty of activity in the quest to improve society, based on a firm belief that the world could indeed be reformed for the better.⁷² Catharine's personal philanthropic endeavours were initially inspired by her introduction into the rationalist environment surrounding Theophilus Lindsey during his pastorate at Catterick. The link which she perceived between the religious integrity of Lindsey and his wife Hannah on the one hand, and their tirelessly active benevolence on the other, served as an inspiration for her own activities. Following the Lindseys' example, she attempted to establish a Sunday school in her house at Bedale, although the undertaking made her a target of ridicule and detraction for neighbourhood notables by whom she was regarded as 'odd and singular'.⁷³ The relationship which she developed after 1780 with Newcome Cappe, however, brought new conviction to Catharine's charitable inclinations, providing her with the intellectual and theological arguments to justify practical philanthropic exertion. Although Cappe's scriptural

⁷⁰G. M. Ditchfield, 'English Rational Dissent and philanthropy, c. 1760-1810,' in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform from the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 193-207.

⁷¹Martin, *Evangelicals United*, pp. 131-140; Bebbington pp. 99-100.

⁷²See chapter 2 above.

⁷³Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 120-4.

studies led him to draw some conclusions which were regarded as somewhat eccentric even within Unitarian circles, his ideas largely corresponded with the necessarian philosophy-theology of which his friend Joseph Priestley was the best-known exponent. Enlightenment beliefs in the potential for progress of human culture combined with faith in the overarching government of God in the understanding that humanity was being divinely guided towards perfection. In 1782 Cappe preached a series of fifteen sermons on this theme under the title, 'The Providence and Government of God,' in which he asserted that ultimately humankind would be brought into perfect harmony with God on earth; and all events taking place were part of the process by which that end was being reached.⁷⁴ Catharine described the sermons as exhibiting the most just and comprehensive view of the subject to be found. Underlining her endorsement of the sentiments which they contained, she published two editions of the sermons in 1795 and 1811.⁷⁵ The aspect of Cappe's exposition which apparently had the greatest significance in confirming Catharine's commitment to philanthropy was the assertion that individuals were the appointed channels through which God's progressive plan for the world was being carried out. He wrote, 'It seems wise that the government of God should be carried on by the instrumentality of others, that men might not be detached and separate from one another, but might live in mutual friendship and dependence, united to one another by the ties of gratitude and love.'⁷⁶ Here was an unequivocal demand for social responsibility and humanitarianism as divinely ordained actions. Catharine argued that the burgeoning philanthropic organisations of the period were so worthy of support as they were nothing less than a concrete manifestation of the improving work of God taking place via human agency. Humanely conducted hospitals and lunatic asylums, she insisted, were but two examples of the quest to alleviate suffering fostered by the 'mild, benignant spirit of Christianity.'⁷⁷ Writing to Lant Carpenter in 1816, Catharine reflected on the establishment and success of the York Auxiliary Bible Society as well as the improvements in the city's schools and hospitals in which she had been involved, applauding the contribution which these institutions made to, 'the amelioration of the human character and the further advancement of their virtue and

⁷⁴Newcome Cappe, *Discourses on the Providence and Government of God*, edited by Catharine Cappe (London, 1811), p. 53.

⁷⁵Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 227.

⁷⁶Cappe, *Discourses*, pp. 99-100.

⁷⁷Catharine Cappe, 'Thoughts on the desirableness and utility of ladies visiting the female wards of hospitals and lunatic asylums,' *The Pamphleteer*, 8 (1816), pp. 371-384.

happiness.⁷⁸ Furthermore, in the free flow of Christian love which philanthropy nurtured the moral condition not only of the recipients but also of the donors was enhanced. The minds of the latter were elevated through what Catharine described as, 'the positive enjoyment which the great author of our being has kindly affixed to the exercise and improvement of the generous benevolent affections - the sacred impress, as it were, of his own infinite goodness.'⁷⁹ Philanthropy was both evidence of God's benevolent plan, and a means by which that plan could itself be furthered.

These older rationalist arguments were not the only ones articulated by Catharine in her advocacy of charitable work, however. During the early nineteenth century, as evangelicalism exerted an increasingly powerful influence upon the nature of inter-denominational cooperation, she began to evaluate the position which Unitarianism occupied within this context. Her perspective displayed the somewhat paradoxical combination of cross-denominational fellowship on the one hand and narrow sectarian interest on the other which was characteristic of committed Christians in the period. She eagerly welcomed the establishment of institutions founded specifically for the promotion of broadly Christian aims in which those of different backgrounds united. On the foundation of the York Auxiliary Bible Society, for example, she reflected,

With what delight upon this occasion, have I seen the friends with whom I am in more immediate religious communion, join heart and hand with some other excellent persons, who are our friends also, but whose speculative opinions, on some points, differ widely from ours; giving thus a sort of happy foretaste of that delightful harmony which shall hereafter obtain, when all that is imperfect shall be done away.⁸⁰

Not all Unitarians shared Catharine's enthusiasm, and the Bible Society in particular was a source of contention. A contributor to the *Monthly Repository* accused Unitarians who joined the Society of duplicity, 'for pretending that *they circulate the Scriptures without note or comment*,' when rational scholarship had shown the Authorised Version used by the Society to be flawed.⁸¹ But in her analysis, Catharine identified two related issues in favour of Unitarian involvement, both of which were guided by her desire to promote that particular

⁷⁸Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 5/10/1816, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

⁷⁹Catharine Cappe, *Thought on Various Charitable and Other Important Institutions, and on the Best Mode of Conducting Them: to which is subjoined an address to the females of the rising generation* (York, 1814), pp. 91-2.

⁸⁰Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 377.

⁸¹*MR*, 17 (1822), pp. 222-3.

system of beliefs. First, she argued that it was vital to the future growth and success of Unitarian views that those who espoused it demonstrated their support for charitable Christian ventures, rather than remaining aloof as many seemed inclined to do. Writing to Lant Carpenter in 1819, she observed,

Many excellent persons there are, whose first object is to do all the good in their power; the active labourers in the promotion of bible societies, school societies, Mission Societies; in the reform of our prisons, hospitals, lunatic asylums, erection of penitentiaries; establishment of savings banks &c., &c. Would that among these Unitarians were always to be classed.⁸²

Two years later, she expressed similar sentiments to Robert Aspland, urging that 'Unitarians who believe that holiness of life and devotedness to the will of God ... is of the very essence of the gospel, should come prominently forward in every good word and work,' giving their support to the wealth of flourishing inter-denominational Christian societies.⁸³ Secondly, Catharine contended that Unitarianism was a truly evangelical faith. This assertion was made explicit in an 1818 letter to the *Monthly Repository* in which she welcomed, 'the many important and highly beneficial institutions recently established and daily increasing amongst us, and in which all sects and parties seem to have cordially united,' but at the same time declared her astonishment at, 'the progress also made in what is erroneously called evangelical religion, a system, to my apprehension, wholly inconsistent with the great truth of the unity and incommunicable perfection of the great God and Father of all.'⁸⁴

These contentions need to be understood in terms of the relationship in which Unitarians stood to their theologically orthodox contemporaries. Both lines of argument were designed to rehabilitate Unitarians into the broader Christian community from which they had to some degree been sundered on account of their heterodox beliefs. From the accusation that they entertained base views of Christ, it was a short step for orthodox Christians to characterise Unitarians as cold and worldly infidels. Catharine's own experiences had made her keenly aware of the opprobrium to which Unitarians' theological position could expose them. In breaking from the Anglican church, she acknowledged that she had suffered considerably in the estimation of some former acquaintances, being 'censured by some,

⁸²Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 9/10/1819, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

⁸³Robert Brooke Aspland, *Memoir of the Life, Works and Correspondence of the Reverend Robert Aspland of Hackney* (London, 1850), p. 441.

⁸⁴*MR*, 13 (1818), pp. 113-4

ridiculed by many, and lamented, may be, by more,' drawing upon herself 'the odium attached to heresy and schism.'⁸⁵ Yet, she acknowledged, by demonstrating a 'genuine, benevolent spirit of real Christianity,' even those who regarded her religious views as little short of heretical were able to work alongside her, or at least to acknowledge that she had no vicious intent.⁸⁶ Translating her personal experience onto a denominational scale, Catharine pointed out that 'Unitarians are truly "as a city set upon a hill",' and such exposure demanded that they demonstrate exemplary conduct and active piety as the best recommendation of their reviled beliefs.⁸⁷ Quoting Channing, she asserted, 'Unitarianism will gain infinitely more by being exhibited as a living spring of devotion & high virtue, than by the ablest defences.'⁸⁸ In terms of early nineteenth-century religion, one of the means by which the claim to 'holiness of heart and life' could be measured was commitment to inter-denominational philanthropy. Catharine sought to draw such recognised approbation onto Unitarians and thereby to enhance the standing of their views.

Douglas Stange's work on British Unitarian involvement in the campaign against slavery in the United States during the thirty or so years after 1833 offers illuminating parallels with the present study, although its focus is on a slightly later period.⁸⁹ In their vigorous espousal of radical abolitionist views, Stange discerns an attempt by Unitarians to dissolve the 'stain' of heresy through good works, an objective which I have suggested informed Catharine's advocacy of Unitarian philanthropic exertion. He also proposes a more intimate relationship between Unitarianism and evangelicalism than the distant separateness which is generally acknowledged to have prevailed. Stange locates the Unitarian commitment to reform in a distinctive group within the denomination whom he styles the 'evangelical Unitarians'. This school was represented by, 'Bible Protestants, orthodox and rigid, accepting miracles and plenary inspiration, fervent in religious life, and distinguished from evangelical dissenters only by the conviction that the Trinity was not a doctrine of the Scripture.'⁹⁰ Some of these characteristics, especially the fervency in religious life, were clearly also present among Catharine and others who were active in earlier cross-denominational ventures

⁸⁵Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 225, 400.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 194, 225.

⁸⁷Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 20/8/1817, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

⁸⁸Catharine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 9/10/1819, MS Lant Carpenter 1, HMC.

⁸⁹D. C. Stange, *British Unitarians Against American Slavery, 1833-65*, (Canbury,) pp. 17-47.

⁹⁰Stange, *British Unitarians*, pp. 33-4.

alongside evangelicals from different churches. I would suggest, though, that there is another, more complex, dimension to the Unitarian engagement with evangelicalism evident in the writings of Catharine and others who shared her beliefs. As her observation cited above on the rapid spread of ‘what is erroneously called evangelical religion’ illustrates, some Unitarians actually sought to appropriate the term evangelical to describe their own creed. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Unitarian scholars claimed, of course, that their beliefs were founded upon strict adherence to gospel revelation, so in that sense they were indisputably Bible Christians. The desire to claim the particular label ‘evangelical’ for themselves, though, must be linked to the synonymity which the term had acquired with ‘serious’ Christianity. It was loaded with implications about the character and conduct of those to whom it applied. Whilst some Unitarians identified it with religious enthusiasm and thoroughgoing bigotry, those who were keen to cooperate directly with other Christians and demonstrate their own piety in action recognised it as a hallmark of integrity.⁹¹

Catharine Cappe’s engagement in and promotion of philanthropy were deeply coloured by her Unitarianism, the influence of which is evident not only in those of her writings which were directed, either publicly or privately, at a sectarian audience. Central both to her own charitable endeavours and to her theorising of philanthropy was the concern to demonstrate that women of intelligence, piety and leisure could and should make a valuable contribution to the welfare of society. In four detailed tracts published between 1800 and 1816, as well as in her posthumous autobiography, Catharine vigorously appealed to middle- and upper-class women to enlarge their sphere of useful exertion through participation in organised philanthropic work. The arguments which she advanced were grounded firmly in and illustrated by her own experiences as a foremost activist in women’s charitable ventures in York. Together, these arguments formed a wide-ranging assessment of the status, roles and responsibilities of women through which Catharine both justified her own involvement in philanthropy and encouraged others to follow her example.

The importance of Catharine’s Unitarian perspective is apparent in the way in which she intimately linked her discussion of the place of women to the notion of social progress under divine direction. As chapter two demonstrated, this was a core theme in the conceptualization of femininity among her Unitarian contemporaries, many of whom borrowed the idea advanced by leading Scottish Enlightenment theorists that the position of women

⁹¹In 1826, Lant Carpenter defended his use of the term ‘evangelical’ to describe his own religious sentiments against attack from other Unitarians, writing, ‘My sentiments have become increasingly evangelical by my feeling more and more the immense importance and value of the gospel as the glad tidings of salvation.’ *MR*, 21 (1826), p. 155.

could be used as an index of social evolution and overlaid it with an explicitly Christian analysis which identified Christianity as the most elevating influence on the status of women. Catharine's debt to this tradition of writing is most apparent in the 'address to the females of the rising generation' which she appended to her 1814 tract on charitable institutions. Here, she urged her readers to contrast their own favoured position, recognised and esteemed as rational and moral agents, with the historical testimonies which revealed that 'for a long succession of ages ... the female sex were generally considered as the property of their imperious masters; not as friends and companions, but as slaves.' In contemporary non-European cultures too women existed under 'a dark cloud of cruelty and despotism, so destructive of every comfort and every virtue.' Englishwomen's emancipation from these shackles of barbarism was entirely owing to 'the equitable, the benign, the heavenly influence of the gospel of Christ.' Conscious of the inestimable blessing which Christianity was to them, women in particular had a duty to 'imbibe its spirit, to follow its precepts, and to obey its commands.' Primarily, this gratitude could be demonstrated by engaging in acts of charity in imitation of Christ's example.⁹² Interestingly, in putting forward this argument, Catharine made rather different use of the theory about women and progress from other Unitarian writers. By the latter, it was employed to outline the appropriate treatment which women should receive from men, and for those arguing in favour of women's right to receive a rational education it was especially valuable.⁹³ Education was not entirely absent from Catharine's analysis. Perhaps drawing on the experiences of her own educational background, she was severely critical of the 'erroneous education' received by many women in the upper and middle ranks which focussed on the acquisition of fashionable accomplishments and tended to fit them only for frivolous, vain and dissipated pursuits.⁹⁴ But, by laying as she did the greater stress on the practical Christian duties which women should undertake, Catharine emphatically shifted agency away from men and onto women. The question was not about what men should permit women to do, but about what women should claim the right to do themselves. When in her 1816 tract on Lady Visitors in medical institutions Catharine confronted the question

⁹²Catharine Cappe, *Thoughts on Various Charitable and other Important Institutions, and on the best mode of conducting them. To which is added an address to the females of the rising generation*, (York, 1814) pp. 96-7.

⁹³Indeed, from among those Unitarians who argued primarily in terms of the need for women's greater mental cultivation, feelings of hostility developed towards the practice of philanthropy. Writing to William Channing in 1841, Lucy Aikin opined that although women's widespread involvement in philanthropy had produced some good effects, 'It has diverted the minds of numbers, not from dissipation only, but from literature, from the arts, from all the graces and amenities of polished life.' P. H. le Breton, *Memoirs, Miscellanies and Letters of the Late Lucy Aikin*, (London, 1864), p. 422.

⁹⁴Cappe, *Thoughts on Charitable Institutions*, pp. 92-5, 97.

of male hostility towards a widening sphere of female responsibility, she emphatically denied the right of men to circumscribe women's development. Her response makes plain her indebtedness to the Unitarian belief in the boundless potential for human improvement. Men's anxiety was based upon an apprehension that women's influence in society would increase as by undertaking new and useful roles they 'attain to yet more enlarged and accurate views of human life and christian duty,' becoming 'distinguished for wise conduct and judicious discrimination.' Such fears, she acknowledged, were well-founded. Writing in terms of unshackled possibilities, she contended that it was not the place of human beings to attempt to limit women's future advancement. Who, she asked, 'shall say to how much higher degrees of consideration and respectability they might eventually attain, were their minds still further enlarged and their consequent modes of life more consistent, rational and disinterestedly benevolent.'⁹⁵

Scrutiny of the arguments which Catharine used to advocate women's philanthropy makes it clear that at no point did she couch her claims in the language of a 'separate spheres' ideal. Indeed, the notion of separate, gendered, public and private spheres seems quite alien to her conceptualization of society. Rather, she advanced a much more holistic view, in which the spheres which might be termed the domestic, the private, the public and the political overlapped with and were mutually dependent upon one another. This analysis, suggesting fluidity and interplay between spheres, enabled Catharine to assert that the scope of women's responsibility was not necessarily confined to a single area, but rather that it might extend across the spectrum. At times, Catharine articulated the idea of women functioning across interlocking spheres by adopting what appear to be fairly conventional lines of debate which emphasised how feminine, domestic qualities might be beneficially carried into a wider arena. A reciprocal exchange of benefits between the home and charitable institutions would result from women's admission into the latter in positions of authority. She stressed the morally elevating influence which 'respectable ladies' would have on the less fortunate with whom they came into contact. In hospitals, for example, they would encourage a, 'sense of propriety and decency in conversation and behaviour,' in their social inferiors among the staff and patients.⁹⁶ 'A lady visitor to an hospital or Asylum,' she asserted, 'should be to that institution what the kind judicious Mistress of a family is to her household.' Simultaneously, the experience and demands of holding a post of responsibility through visiting, would elevate women's mental

⁹⁵Catharine Cappe, 'Thoughts on ladies visiting female wards,' pp. 371-384.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 375.

and moral characters and make them better wives and mothers.⁹⁷

Overall, however, Catharine's writings say strikingly little about women's conduct in the domestic sphere. She was primarily concerned with exploring, legitimizing and encouraging the roles and responsibilities which they might suitably undertake outside the home. In her support for women's philanthropic activism she pointed out a route through which specifically female forms of political identity and public virtue could be claimed and expressed. Historians studying women from a wide array of social backgrounds during the period under discussion here have exposed a myriad of means by which they countered their formal exclusion from the institutions and business of politics and public life. Often, they did so by identifying initially with the interests of, for example, their class, community or party and thence developing the argument that women could help to further those interests, albeit in distinctive and distinctly feminine ways.⁹⁸ Amanda Vickery's observation, based on her study of eighteenth-century women from genteel backgrounds in the north of England, that there were 'ways in which women might lay claim to a certain public spirit through disinterested service to their local community, the county or the nation,' has resonance in the vision of female public service mapped out by Catharine Cappe. Her arguments merged the languages of two key contemporary discourses - those of patriotism and of civic pride - to formulate a demand for respectable women of comfortable means to take on the citizenship duties appropriate to their rank and sex. Explicitly, Catharine stated her conviction that, although they were debarred by their sex from participating in the actual functions associated with political legislation and administration which were open to their menfolk, women were by no means without responsibilities in the national political arena. Collectively as well as individually, they could work to encourage law-abiding behaviour among their social inferiors, 'by promoting, recommending and rewarding habits of industry and good order, so essential to the alleviation of poverty and distress.'⁹⁹ This female patriotic endeavour could be most effectively expressed by engaging in philanthropic work at a local level. As Rosemary Sweet has noted, towards the end of the eighteenth century civic pride came to be increasingly expressed with reference to 'an ideal of urban society which was sober, virtuous, industrious,

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 376-7.

⁹⁸Jane Rendall, *Origins of Modern Feminism*, ch. 7; *idem.* (ed.), *Equal or Different: women's politics, 1800-1914*. (Oxford, 1987); Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*; Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837* (London, 1992) ch. 6; Elaine Chalus, 'That epidemical Madness': women and electoral politics in the late eighteenth century,' in Barker and Chalus, *Gender in Eighteenth-century England*, pp. 151-178; Amanda Foreman, 'A politician's politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, and the Whig Party,' in *ibid.*, pp. 179-204.

⁹⁹Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, pp. 341-2. See also, *ibid.*, *Thoughts on Charitable Institutions*, p. 99.

philanthropic and steadily improving, both in terms of its fabric and the morals of the people.'¹⁰⁰ Central to the projection of such an image of civic virtue was the foundation of local organisations of social amelioration - for example, hospitals, asylums, dispensaries and Bible Societies.¹⁰¹ By exploring the ways in which they could lend support to the efforts of such institutions and demanding the freedom to act accordingly, Catharine claimed, women as well as men could play their rightful part in fostering the realization of the urban ideal. Those who engaged in such work, she insisted, set, 'an illustrious example of female attention to civic duties.'¹⁰² Bringing her argument full circle, Catharine further asserted that the elevating effects which undertaking civic responsibilities produced on the mental and moral character of women would become a source of national pride and a symbol of British superiority:

How delightful in imagination to anticipate the time when the ladies of Britain, eminent in every thing that is truly excellent and praiseworthy, shall shed a lustre on her shores by their transcendent virtues, shall set a glorious example to surrounding peoples, and future generations, by the faithful discharge of every personal, every domestic, and every social duty!¹⁰³

On occasion, Catharine's efforts to find ways in which women could claim the title of patriots through local charitable work took on explicit forms. She was a, if not the, driving force behind the ill-fated project undertaken by York ladies in 1803-4 to provide flannel clothing for the volunteer soldiers quartered near the city.¹⁰⁴ Several months before the scheme was initiated, Catherine had written to the *York Herald* describing her sense of

¹⁰⁰Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford, 1997) p. 255.

¹⁰¹Katharine Webb notes that the York Dispensary was a symbol of civic pride, 'One of the most useful institutions'. The reforming element within a city could exploit the existence of urban rivalry in order campaign for the establishment of these new arbiters of civic virtue in their own area. For example, the Whig *York Herald* argued in January 1812 with reference to the institution of Auxiliary Bible Societies, 'We remind our fellow-citizens that Leeds, Hull, Halifax and many other adjacent Towns, have boldly come forward to support this design, whilst the City of York, the CAPITAL OF THE COUNTY, and which many persons might have expected to have stood foremost in promoting so Christian-like a Charity, has yet made no efforts, or used any exertion, to establish a fund of this description.' 11/1/1812.

¹⁰²Cappe, *Life of Catharine Cappe*, p. 341. Quite quickly the local Whig press began to point to the service of women in York's major public charitable institutions as itself a sign of the city's moral superiority over its neighbours. Remarking in 1816 that the first lady visitors had been appointed to Leeds General Infirmary, the *York Herald* was careful to point out that York County Hospital had pioneered the practice. 20/4/1816.

¹⁰³Cappe, *Thought on Various Charitable Institutions*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁴'Journal of Miss Ewbank,' pp. 29-36. Jane Ewbank records that, largely as a result of insinuations made by their officers, the volunteers overwhelmingly refused to accept the clothing, believing it to be a form of charity.

inadequacy that as a 'private individual, incapable of personal service and unpossessed of wealth or power,' she was apparently unable to offer any assistance to the national war effort. She suggested that perhaps sending in extracts from Newcome Cappe's sermons written during the American war might help to calm agitated spirits during this 'period of alarm and danger.'¹⁰⁵ The proposal clearly failed to fire the imagination of the newspaper's producers, as the extract appended to this letter was the only one it published. What is clear, however, is that Catharine was seeking a way in which women, debarred from offering patriotic service in the ways open to men, could demonstrate their patriotism. As Linda Colley has shown, organising associations to produce flannel clothing for volunteer troops provided such an opportunity, allowing women to demonstrate that their domestic virtues had public as well as private relevance, and, consciously or not, to stake out a civic role for themselves.¹⁰⁶

The discourse of civic virtue on which Catharine developed a female perspective was not, however, the same as that articulated by the middle classes in the expanding towns of the mid-nineteenth century which stressed religion and domesticity.¹⁰⁷ The York context was quite different from that of industrial urban areas. As the records of philanthropic societies indicate, not only was there cooperation between different denominations, but also from different social strata, with support coming from sections of the county gentry as well as the city's professional, business and trading classes animated by religious impulse. Catharine's own philosophical background was among the Yorkshire Whig gentry and Latitudinarian Churchmen of the eighteenth century; she is one of the few women numbered by Caroline Robbins among the eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen.¹⁰⁸ In advocating enlightened and rational pursuits for women, and the undertaking by them of political responsibilities, she developed a female-focussed agenda based on this liberal political tradition which was to be realized through service in the civic sphere.

York Friends did not share the Unitarians' political and philosophical heritage, and there is no evidence of a female perspective on civic or political virtue being articulated in their motivations for activism. Yet although the traditions and gender ideologies of the two

¹⁰⁵YH, 6/8/1803.

¹⁰⁶Colley, *Britons*, pp. 274-6.

¹⁰⁷Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: the political representation of class in Britain, 1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁰⁸Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: studies in the transmission, development and circumstance of English liberal thought from the restoration of Charles II until the war with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 261 and 331-2.

denominations were very different, it is clear that both had the potential to allow women members to develop autonomous identities outside their respective communities as well as within. In the climate of increasing interdenominational cooperation, philanthropic activism and female participation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Quaker and Unitarian women were well-placed to step forward and take on leading roles and responsibilities.

Conclusion

In this comparative study of the position of women in Quaker and Unitarian communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I have argued that the distinctive religious beliefs of both denominations underpinned gender attitudes and practices which offered possibilities for female members to attain a higher degree of personal and intellectual development and individual autonomy than was generally the case in society at large.

They did so in very different ways. In the Society of Friends, the doctrine of the universal Inner Light and the sectarian practices based upon it granted women an extraordinary degree of official authority within their community. They enjoyed equal ministering rights alongside men, and played a significant if subordinate function in the administration of the Society. Although these roles were well-established, however, in the period under discussion the relationship between gender and authority produced considerable debate among Friends, as the subordinate position to which women were confined in the exercise of discipline was apparently contradicted by their superiority in the ministry. The emergence of women as the pre-eminent group within the Quaker ministry was possible partly because of the way in which the Society conceptualized the relationship between the spiritual and daily lives of its members. Notions of spiritual equality between men and women co-existed with a strong sense of the implications of sexual difference. Women were able to emphasise their natural physical weakness and the strength of their familial affections in order to underline the transforming power of God within them. Such language, whilst it was occasionally employed by men Friends, lacked the same potency in their hands, and in daily life their role was more usually associated with earning a living. The conceptual links between women, weakness and willingness to undergo emotional and physical suffering on the one hand, and between men, money and 'the world' on the other hand gave powerful credibility to women as ministers. Those Friends who demanded a greater share for women in the exercise of Society discipline employed these contrasting male and female images in support of their case.

It was not only on theoretical reasoning that women's ministerial strength was based, however. Studying the experiences of women in the Yorkshire Quaker community reveals that female ministers developed a comprehensive range of practices through which to support and perpetuate their collective spiritual leadership. The sexually-segregated business Meetings and concern to protect Friends' reputation against charges of impropriety encouraged women to gravitate together for spiritual and emotional friendship, and they forged local, national and

international networks which provided a practical framework to facilitate the discharge of their ministerial duties. Through these networks, based on the ties of kinship and friendship, Yorkshire's women ministers also took steps to raise up their successors. They did so both informally, as the case of the Tuke-Hoyland family illustrated, and in a more structured way through the York Friends' Girls' School.

Unitarian women lacked access to the kind of institutionalized sectarian authority available to women Friends. Nevertheless, both the intellectual and political heritage and the progressive aspirations of their denomination created an environment in which they were granted an unusual degree of equality alongside men. Unitarians drew on Enlightenment rationalism to argue that human reason, when applied to the understanding of the natural world and the Bible, contained the key to progress and happiness. Incorporating discussions of the meaning of sexual difference into this discourse, they asserted not only that female education must be improved to enable women to fulfill their rational potential, but also that the mental advancement of the sexes must proceed simultaneously and in harmony in order for true progress to be achieved. Rational social intercourse between men and women, both inside and outside marriage, was presented as a vital stimulus to the attainment of intellectual and moral improvement. For leading writers, delineating Unitarian gender ideology was often part of a wider project to establish the progressive credentials of this new denomination with aspirations to social and political consequence.

The evidence from Yorkshire indicates that practical efforts were made by the Unitarian community to provide sources of intellectual improvement for women. Formal schooling of a kind markedly superior in academic content to that available to the majority of girls was supplied by several Unitarian ministers in the region, and in the later part of the period some parents made use of denominational boarding schools of high reputation run by women. Access was provided in less formal ways for women to engage in the sort of sexually mixed social environment designed to foster the rational and moral edification of those present. Often, this sociability was centred on the Unitarian institutions of the region, that is, its chapels and Manchester College at York, underlining the extent to which female participation alongside men was a vital component of the denomination's cultural life. Women were also permitted to take on some important roles at the level of congregational administration. Although this participation was restricted almost exclusively to those single or widowed women who had an independent financial stake in the chapel, it confirms the way in which women were included in the Unitarian reform agenda. In the shift away from trustee-led chapel organization to a vestry system of government, male stake-holders enjoyed extended

rights in the decision-making processes, and women in similar positions appear to have been granted a limited form of access.

Alongside the substantial differences which existed between the gender ideologies and practices of the two denominations, however, a number of common themes have emerged in this study. First, it is clear that the striking and distinctive tone of belief and practice relating to the position of women was set by a relatively narrow elite within both denominations. Among Friends, this elite was spiritual, composed of ministers and a small number of especially active Elders. In life, through correspondence, denominational epistles, ministry and personal example, these women articulated their vision of female leadership. In death, their memoirs and spiritual autobiographies provided both testimony to their own spiritual capacity and inspiration for others. They were not necessarily from the highest social and economic classes in the Society, however. Quaker beliefs and values appear to have had most resonance for middling status families, for whom the Society's well-developed networks and reputation for integrity harmonized with the concerns of their daily lives, and among whom neither the trials of subsistence nor the pull of politeness provided an impediment to spiritual development and the demands of the ministry. The Unitarian elite consisted of ministers and leading lay members. Socially, this was a much narrower group than the Quaker leadership, drawing heavily on professional families. Men and women who had themselves received a liberal education advocated a more widespread application of the practice among women through, for example, sermons, essays, tracts and representations of exemplary individuals. It was members of the same class who endeavoured to provide an environment in which girls and women could enjoy the benefits of education and rational pursuits.

Secondly, it is apparent that the notion of 'separate spheres' offers little help in analysing women's lives in either Quaker or Unitarian communities. In both cases, the denominational community operated as a discrete, mixed-sex sphere in which the functions of 'public', 'private' and 'domestic' spaces converged and where distinctive gender attitudes were articulated. The values and practices espoused in the Meeting House or chapel were reaffirmed and reinforced through a variety of activities based around denominational networks, and through the home-based family and social life of members.

By 1830, the undertaking by women from Quaker and Unitarian backgrounds of both leading and supportive roles in a range of organized cross-denominational ventures was a well-established practice. That they were able to move outside the confines of their own denominational communities into this wider, more public sphere was in part a reflection of two broader contemporary trends. First, the stimulus given to inter-denominational

cooperation and Christian activism by the Evangelical Revival prompted Quaker and Unitarian men to collaborate with those of other faiths in support of new initiatives. Secondly, a widespread recognition that women as a group could make a particular and valuable contribution to the spread of Christian principles through co-ordinated philanthropy encouraged those from different communions to join together in such work. At the same time, however, the significant and disproportionate part which Quaker and Unitarian women played can also be traced more specifically to their respective denominational gender heritages, which provided a variety of theoretical justifications and practical precedents for involvement in these pursuits.

The increasing engagement in the later decades of the period of some Quakers and Unitarians with inter-denominational culture heavily influenced by evangelicalism coincided with subtle but definite shifts in their perspectives on gender. As chapters one and two argued, in both denominations it is possible to identify a trend in pronouncements on the position of women which reveal a greater degree of concurrence with evangelical attitudes than had hitherto been the case. It is important not to overstate the case for change: Friends remained committed to the rights of women to take on ministering and administrative roles in the church, and Unitarians continued to stress the need for improved female education to unleash women's rational capabilities. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the qualifications which some commentators began to append to these traditionally distinctive and potentially liberating standpoints may have been highly significant for the subsequent development of attitudes towards gender among women from Quaker and Unitarian backgrounds. In the introduction to this thesis, I noted that historians have proposed that the roots of the disproportionate level of involvement by both Quaker and Unitarian women in feminist campaigns of the Victorian period can be found in the conflicting attitudes revealed within their denominational gender ideologies where expectations of personal satisfaction were countered by assertions of women's sexual subordination.¹ The tension may have become increasingly acute in the early nineteenth century. The very impulses which gave rise to broadening horizons of opportunity for women to express their personal faith through action simultaneously produced a narrowing of the perspective among leading male Friends and Unitarians on the place of women.

Kathryn Gleadle has admirably demonstrated how the contradictions within Unitarian gender ideology fed into the feminist attitudes and practices of the breakaway 'radical

¹Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford, 1970), p. 153; Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: radical unitarians and the emergence of the women's rights movement, 1831-51* (London, 1995), p. 27.

Unitarians' of the 1830s and 1840s.² There is evidence to suggest that a similar dynamic of frustrated expectation lay behind Quaker women's feminist activism. Cross-denominational cooperation opened up to Friends a new arena of activity in which the dominant evangelical groupings did not share their tradition of female leadership. In an illuminating article, Kathryn Sklar examines how, for example, the desire for social and political acceptance in this milieu manifested itself in the stifling of women's public voice at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, where organizers refused to seat a group of American women delegates on the grounds of their sex. The majority of British delegates at the Convention were Friends, and in shunning the female participants they revealed, as Sklar observes, 'the imperative trend towards political assimilation in the British Quaker community.'³ The events of 1840 also highlight the crucial effect which the internal divisions within Quakerism, and the attendant fears of some that the Society would be tarnished with the stain of infidelity in a cultural climate imbued with the values of evangelicalism, had on the drive for acceptance and respectability. The most outspoken advocate of women's right to be heard at the Convention was an American Quaker delegate, Lucretia Mott. She represented what might be termed the 'far left' of Quakerism, being not simply a Hicksite but also a member of the non-resistance movement. This ultra-radical movement grew out of Garrisonian abolitionism of the 1820s and 1830s, and in a radical extension of traditional Quaker pacifism held that any instruments of coercion, including governments, were sinful. Most of the movement's adherents were Hicksites, but they embraced the doctrine of the Inner Light with even greater certainty and either withdrew or were ejected from that body to form a further schismatic sect. A key element in the ideology of Hicksite non-resisters was the commitment to women's rights.⁴ The events of the Convention made clear, in the eyes of some Quaker men at least, the link between unregulated claims to guidance by the Inner Light and dangerous female excesses.

Direct exposure to evangelical cultural influences complicated Quaker and Unitarian perspectives on the status and roles of women. It did so because throughout the period

²*Ibid.*

³Kathryn Kish Sklar, "'Women who speak for an entire nation': American and British women compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840," *Pacific Historical Review*, (1990) pp. 453-477.

⁴Thomas D. Hamm, 'Hicksite Quakers and the ante-bellum non-resistance movement,' *Church History*, 36 (1994), pp. 557-569. Studies of the American women's movement have stressed the important role played by Hicksite Friends in contrast to the that of women from orthodox Friends' Meetings. See Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: the story of Quaker women in America* (San Francisco, 1986), pp. 93-4; Nancy A. Hewitt, 'Feminist Friends: agrarian Quakers and the emergence of women's rights in America,' *Feminist Studies*, 12 (1986) pp. 27-49.

between 1770 and 1830 the distinctive denominational attitudes and practices of the two communities, which were firmly rooted in their marginal theological and social positions, had offered an unusual degree of opportunity to some women for personal fulfilment. Their respective heritages thus placed Quaker and Unitarian women in a strong position to take on leading roles and responsibilities in a wider, cross-denominational sphere, but in that sphere the dominant values were not always so receptive to the realities of female authority and self-expression.

Appendix 1

Monthly and Preparative Meetings in Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of the Society of Friends.

York:

York; Selby; Cottingwith; Thirsk and Helmsley transferred from Thirsk MM in 1827.

Balby:

Sheffield; Thorne; Warnsworth; Penistone.

Pontefract:

Pontefract; Ackworth; Highflatts; Barton.

Brighouse:

Leeds; Bradford; Brighouse; Mankinholes (Huddersfield); Gildersome; Halifax.

Knaresborough:

Rawdon; Keighley; Skipton; Otley; Netherdale (Nidderdale).

Settle:

Settle; Bentham; Lothersdale; Newton in Bowland; Ayrton; Wray; Langstrothdale transferred to Richmond in 1785.

Richmond:

Aysgarth; Wensleydale; Masham; Richmond; Swaledale; Langstrothdale transferred from Settle in 1785. Transferred to Westmorland QM in 1816.

Thirsk:

Borrowby transferred to Darlington Monthly Meeting in 1826, Thirsk and Huby transferred to York MM in 1827, Bilsdale and Helmsley transferred to Guisborough M M in 1827. Monthly Meeting dissolved in 1827.

Guisborough:

Kirby Moorside;; Hutton le Hole; Danby; Ayton; Bilsdale and Helmsley transferred from Thirsk MM in 1827.

Pickering (formed from Malton and Scarborough MMs in 1788):

Pickering; Whitby; Malton; Thornton le Clay; Scarborough.

Bridlington;

Bridlington transferred to Owstwick MM in 1773; Cranswick transferred to Cave MM in 1773. Monthly Meeting dissolved in 1773.

Owstwick and Cave (Meetings joined in 1781):

Hull; Owstwick; East End; Hornsea; Cave; Shipton; Beverley.

Appendix 2A

Listed occupations of members of York Monthly Meeting, 1790-1835.

Category	No. (%)	Composition
Professional	5 (4)	1 gentleman; 1 land surveyor; 1 physician; 1 surgeon; 1 surgeon/dentist
Merchant/manufacturer	13 (9)	1 baker; 2 flax merchants; 1 looking-glass manufacturer; 8 tanners; 1 vitriol maker
Retail/other non-manual	63 (46)	2 booksellers; 3 butchers; 1 coal dealer; 1 corn and hay factor; 1 druggist; 3 flax drapers; 1 glass shop owner; 10 grocers; 2 hospital superintendent; 3 hospital wardens; 5 linen drapers; 1 meal man; 2 nurserymen; 3 nurses*; 1 porter dealer; 4 schoolmasters; 3 schoolmistresses; 5 schoolteachers*; 4 shopkeepers*; 1 stationer; 5 tea dealers; 2 woollen drapers
Skilled manual	17 (12)	1 breeches maker; 1 bricklayer; 1 carpenter; 1 glover; 1 flax dresser; 1 hatter; 1 heel maker; 1 horn/combmaker; 3 mantua makers*; 1 mason; 1 planemaker; 2 shoemakers; 1 watchmaker; 1 whitesmith
Agricultural	24 (18)	10 farmers; 1 gardener; 12 husbandmen; 1 yeoman
Unskilled	15 (11)	2 labourers; 10 shopmaids; 3 shopmen

*These figures include women as follows: 3 shopkeepers, 5 schoolteachers, 3 nurses, 3 mantua makers.

Appendix 2B

Listed occupations of members of Brighthouse Monthly Meeting, 1813-1835.

Category	No. (%)	Composition
Professional	8 (4)	2 bankers; 1 conveyancer; 1 physician; 4 surgeons
Merchant/manufacturer	72 (36)	1 brewer; 1 brush and mustard manufacturer; 1 cudbear manufacturer; 2 cutlers; 1 drysalter; 2 malsters; 2 manufacturers (unspecified); 22 merchants (unspecified); 10 millers; 1 mustard manufacturer; 2 oil-drawers; 1 sacking manufacturer; 2 stuff-merchants; 1 tanner; 3 woolcombers; 19 woolstaplers; 1 worsted manufacturer
Retail/other non-manual	59 (29)	2 bookkeepers; 1 broker; 1 cheesemonger; 1 commercial traveller; 2 confectioners*; 1 corn dealer; 6 drapers; 1 druggist; 2 flourdealers; 1 governess; 19 grocers*; 3 ironmongers; 3 linendrapers*; 2 porter dealers; 1 salesman; 7 schoolmasters; 3 schoolmistresses; 3 tea dealers
Skilled manual	47 (23)	4 card makers; 5 clog and patten makers; 2 cloth dressers; 9 clothiers; 1 coach maker; 4 flax spinners; 2 hatters; 3 joiners; 1 mantua maker*; 1 painter; 3 shoemakers; 1 stay maker*; 3 tailors; 3 thread makers; 4 weavers; 1 worsted weaver
Agricultural	17 (8)	6 farmers; 1 gardener; 10 yeoman
Unskilled	0	

*These figures include women as follows: 1 grocer (widow), 3 linen drapers, 2 confectioners, 1 mantua maker, 1 stay maker

Appendix 2C

Listed occupations of members of Settle Monthly Meeting, 1813-1837.

Category	No. (%)	Composition
Professional	5 (8)	3 bankers; 1 gentleman; 1 land surveyor
Merchant/manufacturer	15 (25)	4 linen manufacturers; 2 merchants; 4 millers; 4 woolstaplers; 1 worsted manufacturer
Retail/other non-manual	13 (21)	2 drapers; 2 druggists; 3 grocers*; 4 schoolmasters; 2 shopkeepers*
Skilled manual	9 (15)	2 cloggers; 1 flaxdresser; 1 spinning master; 5 weavers
Agricultural	17 (28)	13 farmers; 4 yeoman
Unskilled	2 (3)	1 shopman; 1 warehouseman

*These figures include women as follows: 1 shopkeeper, 1 grocer

Appendix 2D

Listed occupations of members of Pickering Monthly Meeting, 1813-1837

Category	No. (%)	Composition
Professional	0 (0)	
Merchant/manufacturer	14 (14)	1 corn factor; 1 cutler; 1 merchant; 4 millers*; 1 shipbuilder; 2 tallow chandlers*; 4 tanners
Retail/other non-manual	34 (33)	1 bank clerk; 4 drapers; 1 druggist; 18 grocers/drapers*; 1 haberdasher*; 1 hardwareman; 4 schoolmasters; 3 schoolmistresses; 1 shopkeeper*
Skilled manual	16 (15)	1 block and mast maker; 1 bricklayer; 5 carpenters; 1 dressmaker*; 2 saddlers; 2 shoemakers; 1 ship's carpenter; 1 tailor; 1 watchmaker; 1 weaver
Agricultural	34 (33)	32 farmers; 1 gardener; 1 husbandman
Unskilled	5 (5)	4 shopmen; 1 seaman

*These figures include women as follows: 1 miller, 1 tallow-chandler; 2 grocers/drapers (all widows and heads of families), 1 shopkeeper, 1 haberdasher, 1 dressmaker.

Appendix 3

Biographical index of key female members of York, Brighouse, Settle and Pickering Monthly Meetings of the Society of Friends, c. 1770-1830.

Note. This list is not exhaustive, including only those women for whom some biographical information could be found. Women are listed under the surname by which they were known whilst serving in the relevant Meeting, and those who served in the Meeting as both married and single women are listed under their married names, with cross-references where appropriate.

Key to abbreviations

M = minister	rec. = recorded as a minister
E = Elder	app. = appointed as an Elder
YMM = York Monthly Meeting	c. = certificate of removal
BMM = Brighouse Monthly Meeting	res. = resigned
SMM = Settle Monthly Meeting	dis. = discontinued
PMM = Pickering Monthly Meeting	pub. = published
b. = born	dau. = daughter
m. = married	s. = son
d. = died	wo. = widow

Abraham, Ellen M: YMM; b.1758, dau. Thomas and Ellen Abraham of Whitehaven; teacher at Ackworth School 1780-4; teacher at Friends' Girls' School, York 1784-99; rec. 1786; m. Richard Cockin, grocer, of Doncaster 1799; d. 1846.

Alexander, Ann M: YMM; b. 1767 dau. William Tuke (E) tea dealer of York and Esther (q.v.); teacher at York Friends Girls' School 1784-92; teacher at Suir Island School, Ireland, 1792-4; rec. ?; m. William Alexander, later printer and bookseller, of Needham Market, 1796; c to York, 1809; founder and editor of *Annual Monitor*, 1811; pub. *Remarks on the Theatre, and on the Late*

Fire at Richmond, Virginia (1812), Facts Relative to the State of Children who are Employed by Chimney Sweeps as Climbing Boys (1817), A Selection of Hymns, Principally with a Penitential Tendency (1819), Warrior and Pacificus (1819); 2 s. William Henry, Joseph; c to Needham Market, 1841; d. 1849.

- Arthington, Maria M: BMM; b. 1792, dau. Joseph Jowitt, woolstapler, of Leeds and Grace; m. Robert Arthington, brewer, of Hunslet 1816; rec. 1826; pub. *A Few Remarks on the Leading Principles of the Christian Faith: addressed to the Society of Friends in Leeds*, 1836; 4 dau. Susannah b. 1818, Maria b. 1819, Phebe b. 1820; Jane b. 1828; res. from Society 1836; d. 1863.
- Atkinson, Isabel E: SMM; d. 1802.
- Backhouse, Deborah M: YMM; b. 1793, dau. Richard and Elizabeth Lowe of Worcester; 1819 rec. by Tottenham MM; 1822 m. James Backhouse (M), nurseryman, of York; d. 1827; see James Backhouse, *A Memoir of Deborah Backhouse of York* (1828).
- Backhouse, Mary E: YMM; wo. James Backhouse of York; app. 1823; d. 1838.
- Bell, Ann Mercy M: YMM; b. 1706, dau. Martin and Ann Ellwood of London; m. Nathaniel Bell (E), schoolmaster and bookseller, of York, 1731 rec. 1745; d. 1775.
- Bilton, Elizabeth E: BMM; d. 1810.
- Birkbeck, Mary M: SMM; b. 1753, dau. of William Dillworth, banker, and Esther of Lancaster; m. John Birkbeck, banker, of Settle 1779; rec. 1792; 3 s. Dillworth (1) b. and d. 1780, John b. 1781, Dillworth (2) b. 1789, 4 dau. Esther b. 1783, Mary b. 1785, Hannah b. 1788, Sarah b. 1793; d. 1830.

- Birkbeck, Sarah M: SMM; b. 1761, dau. of John Birkbeck, merchant, and Sarah of Settle; rec. 1791; m. Francis Fox, chemist, of Plymouth, 1791.
- Blakes, Phebe M: BMM; b. 1742, dau. John and Sarah Marshall of Rawden; m. James Blakes jun., staff-maker, of Leeds, 1784; rec. ?1763; d. 1814.
- Broadhead, Hannah E and M: BMM; b. 1763, dau. George and Dinah Knowles of Knaresborough; m. John Broadhead, grocer, of Leeds, 1784; app. 1807; rec. 1812; d. 1837.
- Cooper, Mary M: BMM; b. 1770, dau. Thomas and Mary Bleckley, of Ely; rec. 1806; m. Thomas Cooper (E), flashing manufacturer, of Brighouse, 1813; d. 1850.
- Cooper, Sarah M: BMM; d. 1795.
- Copeland, Elizabeth M: BMM; b. 1754, dau. Thomas and Martha Brady of Thorne; assistant teacher at Ackworth School, 1779-85; m. Thomas Copeland, linen draper, of Leeds, 1785; d. 1830.
- Crossland, Mary E: BMM; m. Robert Crossland (E), cardmaker, of Oldfield Nook; d. 1821.
- Dernally, Ann M: BMM; parents not Friends; rec. 1823; d. 1840.
- Elam, Catherine E: BMM; app. 1807; d. 1831.
- Elam, Sarah E: BMM; d. 1795.
- Ellis, Mary E and M: BMM; b. 1750; m. John Ellis (E), schoolmaster, of Gildersome, 1774; mistress Gildersome School; app. 1791; rec. 1801; 2 dau. Sarah, Eliza; d. 1827.

- Firth, Mary M: BMM; d. 1797.
- Fisher, Phebe E: BMM; m. as second husband John Fisher, merchant, of Huddersfield; app. 1807; c. to Liverpool, 1836; 5 s. Edward, John, Joseph, Joshua, Henry; 4 dau. Elizabeth, Maria, Henrietta, Anna; also 1 dau. Phebe Travel from first m. to Travel Fuller.
- Firth, Mary E: BMM; d. 1792.
- Fletcher, Elizabeth E: BMM; d. 1831.
- Greenwood, Hannah E: BMM; d. ?1790s.
- Grubb, Sarah M: YMM and PMM; b. 1756 dau. William Tuke, tea dealer, of York and first wife; Elizabeth; rec. ?; m. 1782 Robert Grubb (E); c. to PMM; c. to Clonmel, Ireland, 1784; founded Suir Island Friends' Girls School; d. 1790; posthumous pub. *Some Remarks on Christian Discipline, as it Respects the Education of Youth* (1795); see *Some Account of the Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb* (1794, 1796).
- Harris, Sarah M: BMM; rec. 1818; c. to Balby MM, 1840.
- Hart, Hannah M: PMM; b. 1733, dau. John and Eleanor Preston of Brighouse; rec. ?1759; m. Roger Hart (E), grocer and draper, of Pickering, 1760; 2 dau. Tabitha, Ruth; d. 1815.
- Hird, Sarah E: BMM; d. ?1790s.
- Hodgson, Phebe M: SMM; m. Jonathan Hodgson (M) of Settle; d. 1800.
- Houghton, Phebe E: BMM; dau. Marlon and Mary Cooper of Raistrick; m. James Houghton (E), cardmaker, of Brighouse, 1780; d. 1812.

- Hoyland, Baraba M: BMM; b.1764, Lonodn, parents not Friends; m. William Hoyland, grocer, of Sheffield; rcvd. 1792; rec.1800; c. to BMM, 1812; 3 s. William Frazer, Wheeler, John; 3 dau. Ann, Barbara, Elizabth; d. 1829.
- Hustler, Christiana M: BMM; b. 1731, dau. William Hird (M) and Sarah (E) of Knaresborough MM; m. John Hustler, merchant, of Bradford, 1763; dau. incl. Sarah b. 1765 (q.v.); s. incl. John (E), merchant; d. 1811.
- Hustler, Sarah E and M: BMM; b.1765, dau. John Hustler, merchant, and Christiana (q.v.) of Bradford; app.?.; rec. 1802; d. 1817.
- Jowitt, Rachel E: BMM; b. 1782, dau. Thomas and Cicely Crewdson of Kendal; m. Robert Jowitt (M), woolstapler, of Leeds; app. 1828; 2 s. John b. 1811, Robert Crewdson, b. 1821; 5 dau. Elizabeth b. 1812, Susannah b. 1814, Rachel b. 1817, Mary Ann b. 1819, Esther Maria b. 1825; d. 1856.
- Jowitt, Susannah E: BMM; m. John Jowitt, woolstapler, of Leeds; app. 1816; d. 1819.
- Kaye, Hannah E: BMM; m. Benjamin Kaye (E); d. 1805.
- Kendal, Elizabeth E: SMM; m. James Kendal (E); d. 1808.
- Linskill, Mary E: PMM; dis. 1798.
- Maud, Ann E: BMM; dau. Anthony and Hannah Wilson, Kendal; m. (1) ? Marriot, (2) Wiliam Maud, later surgeon, of Bradford, 1811; app. 1816; c. to ?1831.
- Mason, Mary M: SMM; c. to Durham, 1812.

- Murray, Hannah E: YMM; from New York; m. Lindley Murray (M), gent.; d. 1834.
- North, Ann E: BMM and YMM; m. Benjamin North (M) of Leeds; c. to York, 1792; c. to Leeds, 1799; d. 1825.
- Price, Hannah M: YMM; c. fr. Sussex, 1827; d. 1830.
- Priestman, Ann M: PMM; b. 1775, dau. of David Priestman (E), tanner, and Elizabeth (q.v) of Malton; rec. 1826; d. 1853.
- Priestman, Elizabeth M: PMM; b. 1749 dau. Joseph and Rebecca Taylor; m. David Priestman, tanner, of Malton, 1773; rec. ?1781; d. 1797; dau. incl. Ann b. 1775 (q.v.).
- Priestman, Sarah M: YMM; m. Thomas Priestman, tanner, of York; 2 s. David, Daniel; 3 dau. Ann, Sarah, Hannah; d. 1796.
- Richardson, Isabel M: YMM and PMM; b. 1777, dau. Henry and Hannah Richardson of Witby; 1800 c. to York; rec. 1812; c. to Hull 1813; c. to Pickering, 1822; m. Henry Casson of Hull, 1824; d. 1857.
- Rowntree, Elizabeth E: BMM; dau. John and Elizabeth Lothington of Scarborough; m. John Rowntree, grocer and draper, of Scarborough, 1785; app. 1810; d. 1825.
- Rowntree, Hannah E: PMM; dis. 1798.
- Rowntree, Rachel M: PMM; b. 1770, dau. Nicholas and Dorothy Richardson of Riseborough; m. William Rowntree, farmer, of Riseborough, 1794; rec. 1805; d. 1825.
- Stansfield, Elizabeth E: BMM; m. Joshua Stansfield, woolstapler, of Halifax; dau.

- incl. Deborah Wilson (q.v.).
- Storrs, Mary E: BMM; d. 1796.
- Tate, Mary M: YMM; dau. Richard and Ellen Shaw of Newton in Bowlnad; m. John Tate (E), husbandman, later coal dealer, of Cottingwith; rec. ?; d. 1804.
- Thimbeck, Mary M: SMM; d. 1800.
- Thornhill, Martha M: PMM; m. Joseph Thornhill, draper, of Pickering; rec. 1821; 1 s. Henry Lister; 3 dau. Jane Scarth, Elizabeth, Ann; c. to Pontefract, 1829.
- Tuke, Ann - see Alexander
- Tuke, Elizabeth M: YMM; b. 1760 dau. William Tuke, tea dealer, of York and first wife Elizabeth; rec. ?; m. Joseph Wheeler, woollen draper, of Hitchin, 1795; d. 1826.
- Tuke, Esther M: YMM; b. dau. of Timothy and Maud of Bradford; rec. ; m. as second wife William Tuke, tea dealer, of York, 1765; 1 s. Samuel b. 1766; 2 dau. Ann b. 1767 (q.v.), Mabel b. 1771 (q.v); d. 1794.
- Tuke, Mabel E: YMM; b. 1771, dau. William Tuke, tea dealer, and Esther (q.v.) of York; app. 1802; m. John Hipsley (E), mercer, of Hull, 1804; rec. by Owstwick and Cave MM, 1812; d. 1864.
- Tuke, Sarah - see Grubb
- Wilson, Deborah M: SMM; b. 1770, dau. Joshua Stansfield, woolstaper, and Elizabeth (q.v.) of Halifax; m. Richard Wilson, calico manufacturer, later yeoman, of Thornton in Craven, 1802; rec.

1824; c. to Preston, 1844; d. 1847.

Wilson, Rachel

E: BMM; d. 1819.

Walker, Hannah

E: BMM; d. 1792.

Wilson, Mary

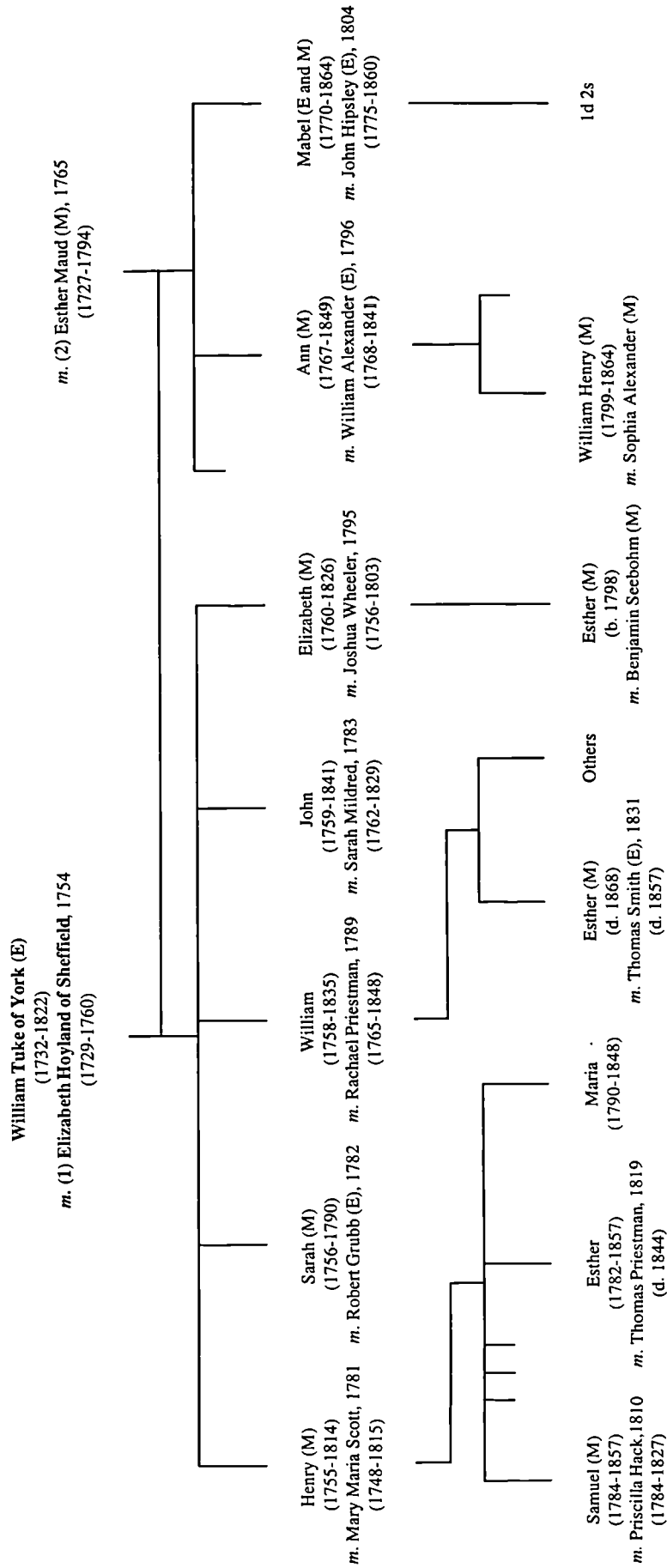
E: BMM; app. 1807; d. 1809.

Witchell, Mary

M: BMM; rec. 1818; m. William Wright, merchant, of Sheffield, 1822; c. to ?, 1824.

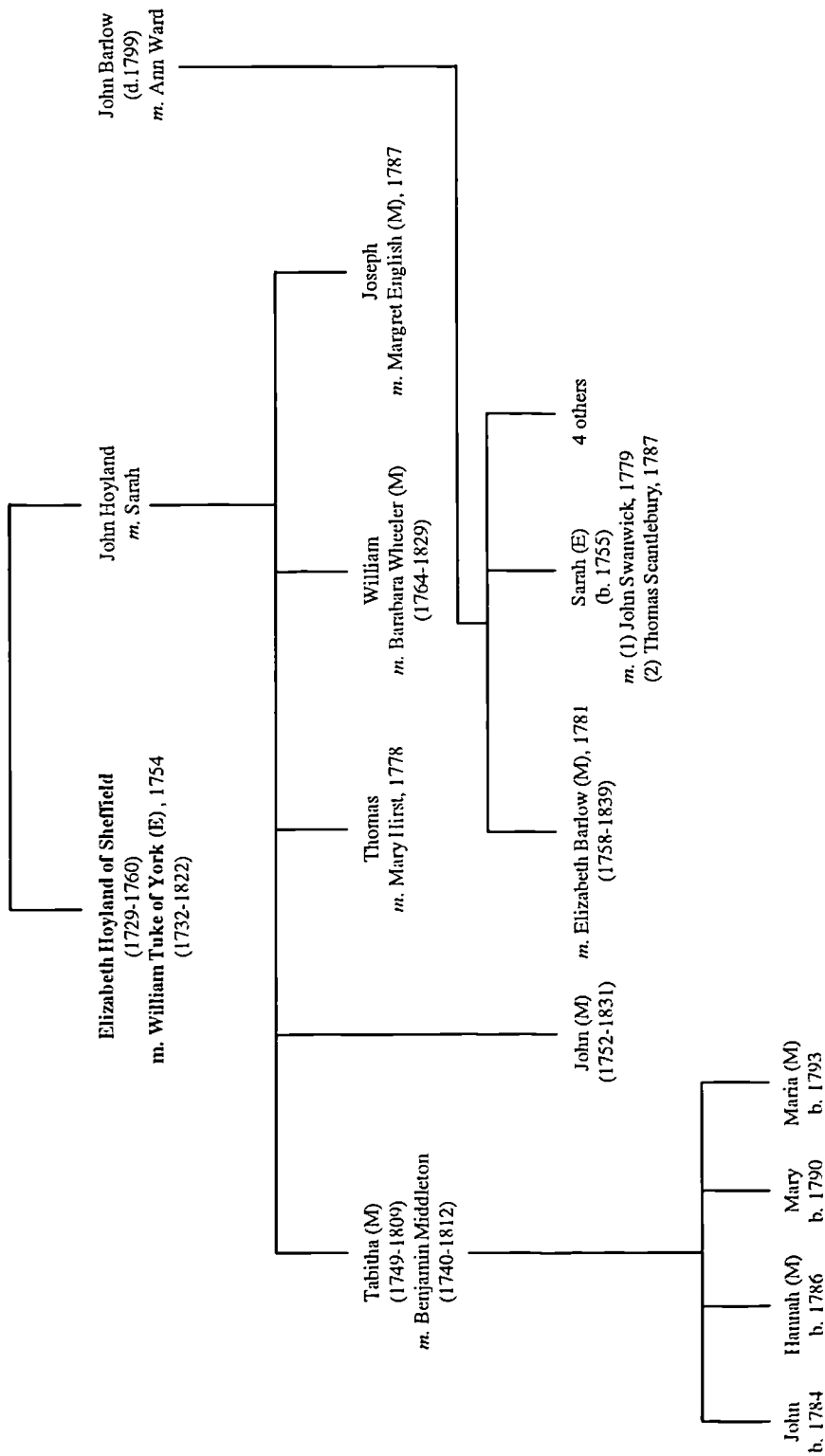
Appendix 4A

Tuke-Hoyland family of York and Sheffield (I)



Appendix 4B

Tuke-Hoyland family of York and Sheffield (II)



Appendix 5

Publications of Catharine Cappe.

Books

An Account of Two Charity Schools for the Education of Girls, and of a Female Friendly Society in York: interspersed with reflections on charity schools and friendly societies in general (York, 1800).

Critical Remarks on Many Important Passages of Scripture: together with dissertations upon several subjects tending to illustrate the phraseology and doctrine of the New Testament, by the Late Reverend Newcome Cappe, to which are prefixed memoirs of his life (York, 1802)

Discourses Chiefly on Devotional Subjects, by the Late Reverend Newoome Cappe, : to which are appended memoirs of his life (York, 1805).

Poems Written on Different Occasions by Charlotte Richardson, edited by Catharine Cappe (York, 1806)

Poems Chiefly Composed During the Pressure of a Severe Illness, by Charlotte Richardson, edited by Catharine Cappe (York, 1809).

A Connected History of the Life and Divine Mission of Jesus Christ (York, 1809).

Discourses on the Providence and Government of God, by the late Reverend Newcome Cappe (York, 1811).

Thoughts on Various Charitable and Other Institutions, and on the Best Mode of Conducting Them: to which is added an address to the females of the rising generation (York, 1814).

Memoirs of the Late Reverend Newcome Cappe (York, 1820).

On the Incompatibility of the Love of Pleasure with the Love of God: in a discourse by the late Reverend Newcome Cappe (York, 1820).

Memoirs of the Life of the Late Mrs Catharine Cappe, Written by Herself (York, 1823).

Reflections on the Public Ministry of Christ, Deduced from the Records of the Four Evangelists. Edited by Charles Wellbeloved (York, 1824).

Periodicals

Athenaeum

vol. 4 (1804)

p. 217 The poems of Charlotte Richardson.

P. 401 Her *Life of Christ*.

Christian Reformer

vol. 5 (1819)

pp. 10-16 'Mr Cappe's reflections on Christ's temptation.'

vol. 6 (1820)

pp. 298-9 'The spread of Unitarian Christianity.'

vol. 7 (1821)

pp. 234-8 'Bishop Burnet's letter to Charles II.'

Monthly Repository

vol. 2 (1807)

pp. 27-30 Newcome Cappe's biblical criticism, with extracts.

pp. 114-6 'The Unitarian Academy at York.'

vol. 4 (1809)

p. 667 The decline of Presbyterian congregations.

vol. 5 (1810)

pp. 118-9 Newcome Cappe's biblical criticism, with extracts.

vol. 7 (1812)

pp.109-17 'Memoir of Mrs Lindsey.'

vol. 11 (1816)

- p. 145 Notice of her intention to publish sermons of Newcome Cappe and dedicate them to College students.
- vol. 12 (1817)
- pp. 29, 80 British and Foreign Bible Society and British and Foreign Schools Society.
- vol. 13 (1818)
- p. 65 'Memoir of Mrs Jones of Manchester.'
- pp. 113-4, 259 Unitarianism not 'cold and cheerless.'
- p. 248 The essentials of Christianity.
- p. 386 'Cappism.'
- vol. 14 (1819)
- p. 292 Charles Wellbeloved's evening lectures.
- p. 358 Extracts from her correspondence with Unitarian ministers in America.
- pp. 490-1 Unitarianism in America; the Massachusetts Peace Society.
- vol. 15 (1820)
- p. 14 Unitarianism in America.
- p. 511 Unitarianism in America and opposition to slavery.
- p. 598 Peace Societies.
- Pamphleteer*
- vol. 8 (1816)
- pp. 371-384 'Thoughts on the desirableness and utility of ladies visiting the female wards of hospitals and lunatic asylums.'

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Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York

Bootham Park Hospital Archives

Grey Coat School Records

Retreat Archives

St Saviourgate Chapel Records

Tuke Papers

York County Hospital Archives

Minute Book of the York Friends' Girls' School

Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

Carlton Hill MSS

Clifford Street MSS

Papers of Robert Jowitt and Sons

Dr Williams's Library, London

Theophilus Lindsey Correspondence

Robert Millar Papers

Miscellaneous Small Donations

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Mrs Welby's Donation

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'Dictionary of Quaker Biography'

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Letters of Ann Coning

Gibson MSS

Memoirs of Barbara Hoyland, addressed to her children

Letters of Rebecca Jones to Ann Tuke

Jane Pearson and Thomas Wilkinson Correspondence

Letters of Martha Smith

William and Esther Tuke Letters

Journal of Mabel Wigham

Henry Wormall's Journal

Harris Manchester College, Oxford

Aspland MS

Lant Carpenter MS

Evans MS

Misc MS

Misc MNC MS

James Martineau MS

Robberds MS

Seddon MS

Wood MS

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Records of Pickering Monthly Meeting

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Sheffield City Archives

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West Yorkshire Archive Service (Calderdale)

Northgate End Chapel Records

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