

Images and perceptions of wives and daughters of the Victorian clergy

Georgina M Burrows (2002)

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**Images and perceptions of wives and daughters of the  
Victorian clergy**

**Georgina Margaret Burrows**

**School of Humanities, Oxford Brookes University**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy

**June 2002**

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## **Abstract**

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# **Images and Perceptions of Wives and Daughters of the Victorian Clergy**

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This research is about Victorian women, who were either the daughters or wives of clergymen of the Church of England, placing them in the social and religious context of their time. In a group biography of three women it looks at the companionate marriage of Henrietta and Samuel Barnett, in a partnership of shared projects, reform and delivery of the social gospel. Catherine Marsh was the daughter of an evangelical clergyman. Her role as 'daughter at home' never changed though she developed a ministry of preaching, writing and philanthropy that took her influence far beyond her father's parishes. As a clergy daughter, Catharine Tait would have been happy so to remain had she not married Broad Churchman Archibald Tait who rose from schoolmaster to Dean to Bishop to Primate of All England. The account of their life together tells of the challenges of these roles, of personal ambition and of great personal tragedy.

In the ordination service, a priest of the Church of England promises to 'so frame and fashion his own self, and that of his family' that they become 'wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ'. In a wider context, this study looks at the lives of other clergy wives and daughters and the opportunities and constraints of the exemplary lifestyle. It explores the diversity of clergy lifestyles, the problems of poverty, loss of faith, marital incompatibility and the, often unreasonable, expectations imposed by society, their husbands and even the women themselves. Through a study of advice literature, as well as contemporary fiction, it looks at the stereotypes thus constructed, the potency of image and inaccuracy of perceptions with which these women had to live.

In the long timespan of Victoria's reign the women in this thesis mirror change in the church and in society. Change made the priest relinquish many of his patriarchal roles and embrace a more sacerdotal form of ministry, while at the same time creating more and more opportunities for wives and daughters to take on new tasks. Change discredited the myth of the rural idyll and dislodged the certainties of a country parish while opening up new fields of mission in the industrial cities. Change saw the Anglican church relinquish its hold on a diminishing worshipping community while maintaining all the expectations and demands on clergy and their families. Change brought to light immense inequalities and injustices in women's lives and ultimately the reforms necessary to redress these while imposing the encircling restrictions of the separate (private) sphere. The thesis concludes that despite this attempt to 'net by invisible rules' the women of the Victorian middle class, and more particularly the women of the rectory and vicarage, these women were empowered by their exemplary position and that this empowerment enabled them to play a fuller role in supporting their husbands and fathers in what was in effect a shared ministry.

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## **Dedication**

To Ron, who supported me through all the beginning years, who never thought I should take it this far, but who, had he lived, would have made sure I had finished it sooner.

And to all those clergy wives and daughters whose lives have become so entwined with mine and whose thoughts and stories have been an inspiration not just for the writing but for living – 'wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ'.

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## Acknowledgements

This has been a long hard struggle from a part-time master's degree which I undertook with trepidation, through a myriad of opening doors, and eventually surmountable obstacles to a series of life-changing experiences. I have, however, not taken this journey alone and I am indebted to all those who have accompanied me somewhere along the way.

My first thanks must go to my two supervisors, Professor Anne Digby at Brookes who has constantly 'talked me up' and restored my flagging confidence and Professor Angela John at Greenwich whose sensitive interventions and advice have also sustained me. Not satisfied with two professors, I must also thank Professor David Parkin, my employer at Oxford, whose penetrating questioning and lateral thinking have been an inspiration. I am grateful for the support and encouragement of all my colleagues and many students at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, particularly Roger Goodman, Vicky Dean, Katrin Hansing, Sea-Ling Cheng (for neck massage), Zul Hirji and Dominique Lussier all of whose faith in me has kept me going.

I owe especial thanks to Mrs Colville, great-granddaughter of Catharine and Archie Tait for her hospitality and her unique and invaluable assistance in giving me a different perspective on her family.

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## **Part I Introduction**

### **1. Preface**

This thesis is about women and marriage, about duty and commitment, about expectations and standards, about personal fulfilment in a world different from ours by virtue of time, the structure of society and the relationship of that society to the church. In the process of writing it I hope to indicate how some women in the household of Victorian Church of England clergy grew and developed. I will illuminate, I hope, their lifestyles and the determinants which governed the way they lived – both the social and the spiritual.

I come to this subject, not as the wife or daughter of a clergyman. Indeed, as far as my research can tell me, there have never been any clergy in my family. Predominantly my family have been churchgoers; Sunday School teachers, deacons, members of choirs, temperance leagues and women's meetings, leaders in Guide and Boys Brigade movements. Mostly they have been non-conformists but there have been Anglicans among them. Their attachment to the church has therefore, been that of user/client/customer or as part of the lay management. It is quite a different situation therefore, from that of the clergy family and so, while I am well versed in the pattern and requirements of church life in this and the past two centuries, I have no personal experience of life in the vicarage.

My principal interest has been in clergy marriage and whether it is in any significant way different from any other marriage. Such a marriage might be compared with others in what might seem to be similar circumstances – doctors, lawyers, politicians. It may involve 'living over the shop' as do the shopkeeper, the farmer, the doctor. It will certainly involve 'tied' housing and a possible requirement to move, very often at the instigation of others. I will be questioning whether such a union is 'more than a marriage', more than a straightforward commitment between one man and one woman to a lifetime of devotion and cohabitation.

Another matter that concerns me is the life and role of daughters of the clergy. I will investigate whether the commitment to a life of service, in an exemplary position to which they were not party at its making, is nevertheless, one which they uphold for the rest of

their lives. I will explore the ways in which this inherited commitment has framed and fashioned<sup>1</sup> the lives of young women and investigate whether it has determined how the later parts of their lives were spent. I plan to examine their relationships with other family members, especially their fathers and brothers and whether such relationships render them different from other daughters of middle-class and professional families.

The setting for such examinations has been confined to the Anglican Church in England and within the time frame of the reign of Queen Victoria. I chose this period because it follows on immediately from my previous research<sup>2</sup> and therefore, I thought it might give some impression of development over time. These sixty-four years seem to cover a period of immense change in some areas and yet still retain some of the continuity and security, which have been important in the maintaining of communities. I am interested in the management of change in a climate of tradition and entrenchment and the lives of these women, in this context and this period, seem to me to provide a good vehicle through which to examine such change.

I will look not only at the institution of marriage, and the attendant implications of social, financial, behavioural, cultural and spiritual constraints, but I will look at these through the lives of particular women. Whereas in my previous work I have presented my findings thematically, I have on this occasion opted to present the majority of issues and themes as they have manifested themselves in the lives of three women, Catharine Tait, Catherine Marsh and Henrietta Barnett. The biographical chapters on these women form three central case studies which encompass both clergy wives and daughters, cover the whole time span of the thesis and represent aspects of nineteenth century religious and social life which I feel it is important to explore. I will also reflect, in the preceding shorter thematic chapters, on some issues that were more important in the lives of other clergy wives and daughters. I suspect there will be much overlap between the principal subjects of this study and the women informing the wider view of clergy marriage and family life in other chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> 'fram'd and fashioned' – I have used this expression frequently throughout the thesis because I believe it has particular bearing on the life patterns of the women studied. It originates from the promises made by a priest in the service of ordination. (see introduction to section 3 chapter 2 – Catharine Tait)

<sup>2</sup> Gina Burrows (1992) *The Wives and Daughters of the Clergy in England during the period 1750 – 1830* Oxford Brookes University MA dissertation..

I also want to consider whether, rather than being constrained, it may be the case that these women were very much more enriched than other women by the nature of the work and situation of their husbands and fathers. It is a possibility that such a situation gave them an entrée into a world, and opportunities for service and fulfilment, that were denied women of similar social standing but in other walks of life. The period in which this work is set is one of social reform, and women's involvement in the processes which brought about such reform, either in the microcosm of good works within a parish or in the wider arena of organised philanthropy, was of great significance. A view taken of middle-class women during the nineteenth century must therefore address the question of 'separate spheres' and the conflict of public and private in the lives of these women. This issue is particularly relevant, given the nature, view and usage of the parsonage house – never really a totally private place, and the exemplary requirements of the clergy family, constantly in the public eye and under the pressure of a multiplicity of expectations.

Contingent with the changes that were happening socially and demographically during this period is a consideration of the country as compared with the urban parish. Change may have been slower to take place in the rural setting, where the traditional certainties remained to some extent certain for much longer, but when change came, its effect on those whose life was bound up in the social fabric of church and parish was immense. The mass exodus to the towns and cities, to answer the call for factory and mill workers and the ever deepening crises on the land faced the church with new challenges and demanded a different sort of clergy family to meet the new situations that presented themselves. That the church patently failed in this area is argued by many, but, nevertheless, the clergy families caught up in this change must form part of this study.

If change on a social scale presented the church with problems, so during this period, did aspects of faith and doctrine. Wives and daughters had the problems this brought to their husbands and fathers to sort out in their own ways. Matters of faith, of interpretation and principle may have weighed heavily on the clergy as the waves of evangelicalism, revival, Tractarianism and all the vicissitudes of high, low and broad church swept up the aisles of the parish churches, but the ripples of these waves surrounded the women too. Matters of different opinion, loss of faith, change of allegiance and questions of loyalty affected them, whether as individuals or in their role

as supportive women and will be touched upon in further chapters. Other forms of change that I shall explore are those brought about by the career patterns of clergy. There have always been some clergy who have stayed put within one parish from their ordination through to their burial. However, a large number of clergy would not have expected permanence in one place and would have sought or accepted changes of parish, of setting, of patronage and accommodation which would have had considerable effect on their wives and daughters. I will look at how they addressed these changes and what qualities it called forth from them in order to deal with them.

Not all changes of appointment are purely geographical. Some clergy are also bound to advance and to seek or to find preferment. In the case of Archibald Tait this meant a progression from priest and schoolmaster to Primate of All England. The role of a wife and daughters in this steep climb is also worthy of study and I will be looking at how Catharine Tait and her younger daughters dealt with his meteoric rise. Such promotion does call into question other matters. The place of ambition and social interaction and the tensions between leadership and the priestly function are also examined, not only in her life, but in that of Minnie Benson and the Tait's daughter Edith, both of whom became wives of Archbishops of Canterbury.

Inevitably, in studying these women, it is necessary to study the men with whom they were bound up and to reflect on the nature of their relationships. The stated context of this work is that of images and perceptions, and I consider these important since it is the force of such images and perceptions in the public mind, as well as in the view of the women themselves, which colours so much of our knowledge about them. Additional to these images are those contrived by writers of fiction. More briefly, I will examine the role of fiction as an historical source, the significant part played by clergy families within fictional narratives as well as the role and influence of writers of fiction from clergy families and the insights and issues they have brought to their work.

It would be impossible within a thesis covering a lengthy period to give a totally comprehensive view of all clergy wives and daughters. I have therefore, decided to construct the work around a fairly intensive study of three women, supported by work on an additional set of women and placing these within the context of a wide-ranging view of a much larger cohort of women whose life experiences or writing make a contribution to the composite picture. Because my concern is not only with women's lives and



experiences but with the images and perceptions of and about these women, I have included some material, both contemporary and current, which can be regarded as generalisation. This I believe to be relevant in this context, feeding as it does the stereotype and the public persona with which these women had to live.

Many of the expectations set upon the women in this study were those of the society in which they lived, and the prevailing thinking of the time might have tended towards a pattern of woman at the centre of the home, the family and the marriage, achieving her greatest power through the improving influence of her nature. But alongside the pressures of convention as expressed in guidance literature, it is inevitable that the principal guiding force in these women's lives would be the example of Christ and his teaching as set out in scripture. Here was guidance of a different nature, speaking of the salvation of the individual and the requirements of the life of faith for all. I think it is important to consider how much the faith of these women determined how they lived their lives, how much they saw their role as supportive woman and centre of the family as God's plan for them and to what extent they were bound to seek to bring in Christ's kingdom through their own work and witness. It is possible that the expectations of society were in conflict with views of the life of faith as expressed in the New Testament.

In my life I have known a number of clergy wives. Like most of the women in this study, they have been strong women of great ability, always self-effacing and in a supportive role to a husband whose calling would not necessarily have been one they would have chosen either for themselves or for a consort, and whom they married because they loved the man. I wish to discover if it is the potent combination of *Eros*, *agape* and personal faith in God which has been the empowering force driving these women to achieve so much. I believe there is a place for the supportive woman and that her place in history should be marked.

Midori Yamaguchi, whose recently completed thesis Unselfish Desires: Daughters of the Anglican Clergy, 1830-1914,<sup>3</sup> chronicling the contribution and lifestyle of clergy daughters in this period, has revealed from her research a rich history of dedicated service and lifelong commitment to others and has concluded that the nature of the

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<sup>3</sup> Midori Yamaguchi (2001) Unselfish desires: Daughters of the Anglican Clergy 1830-1914, University of Essex PhD.

clerical upbringing was fundamental to this commitment. I believe my work is able to complement her findings, dealing as it does, with a similar set of women, and coming to some similar conclusions in terms of the place of duty in the life of anyone brought up within a clerical household. Common to both pieces of research is the parsonage house with its semi public situation and the role played by external and internal expectations in the lives of these women. What Yamaguchi identifies in her work is the strong paternal influence in such households and the gendering of roles and expectations to the extent that for some the role of dutiful daughter becomes a life's work to the sublimation of personal development and fulfilment in a world beyond the vicarage.

My research however, having as its principal focus the life of clergy wives, some of whom, but not all, were clergy daughters, explores the family dynamic in different ways. It is the husband/wife relationship which is the central pillar and the ways that relationship not only manifested itself but was observed and commented upon by others. Only two women seem to have produced research solely concerned with the wives of the clergy in England. Margaret Watt's 1945 monograph, The Parson's Wife in History, traces the development of the position and role of women married to clergy from the Reformation to the Second World War. Sociologist Janet Spedding's doctoral thesis focuses on clergy wives in the 1970's<sup>4</sup>, and through a quantity of interviews presents a view of clergy wives and clergy marriage as seen by the women themselves. The findings of this work have contributed to her further work on the 'incorporated wife' as have Shirley Ardener *et al's* studies into missionary wives and the wives of other professional men. My work will, I believe add another dimension to the research by combining an historical perspective with a case study approach and interpreting the women's own writing and their biographies to illustrate their own perception of themselves, their role and their relationships.

In attempting to study the images and perceptions of women as partners and as products of clergy marriage one is treading on unsafe ground for images and perceptions are ephemeral and hard to quantify. It is therefore essential to listen to the voices of those women I have studied, to take account of their families, their biographers, their critics and those whose lives they touched and to allow those voices to give substance to

the images and refute or justify the perceptions. It might be said that clergy marriage is to some extent a '*ménage à trois*' with God as the third party. With this in mind, it may be possible to conclude that this was the element that made such marriages special and the women within them worthy of particular study and attention.

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<sup>4</sup> Janet Spedding (1975) Wives of the Clergy: A Sociological Analysis of Wives of Ministers of Religion in Four Denominations. Bradford University PhD.

## 2. Church history

When Archbishop William Howley placed the crown of England on the head of Queen Victoria on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1837, surrounded by his brother bishops and clergy, the Church of England was caught up in a process of fragmentation and discord which would continue and grow throughout the whole of this queen's reign. Looking at the history of the Church of England at this period one might deduce that it was not so much a period of revolution as of evolution, but at the time the changes which were coming about, both in terms of establishment and of theology, appeared outrageous and earth shattering. Probably, to the man (or woman) in the street, or more appropriately, in the pew, these changes appeared far less fundamental and interfered little with their relationship with the church, happening over a period of time and mostly within the higher echelons of the church, the universities and the government. To the reformers and the traditionalists, the upper clergy as well as to the leaders of the varieties of non-conformity, the issues were vital, totally fundamental and determined by God. The ordinary Church of England clergy, together with their wives and families, occupied an area of middle ground. The views of their bishops and patrons would have had some significance, as would the effect on their worshipping congregation of the starting up of new independent chapels or an increase in popularity of older places of dissenting worship. Changes, arguments of faith, liturgy and establishment would have been the subject of much parsonage discussion and conversation, with visiting clergy, with the resident pupils, with the squire and within the clergy family. For the clergy wife they were matters that affected her life to a greater or lesser degree but over which she had no say, power or control and may, or may not, have been afforded an opinion.

At the beginning of the period social and political changes during the eighteenth century had rendered the status of the parish priest that of close associate of the squire, an adjunct to the lesser gentry.<sup>5</sup> This suited well the political will of the landed classes who wished to have the parson, together with his influence, firmly in their camp. But while it suited the gentry, it did little to ally the parson to his flock who perceived this clear demarcation of loyalty and responded accordingly. The troubles of revolution and

insurrection in France and America had caused the Tory landowners to want to see their own population safely and securely locked into a proper code of dependence and deference. The age of the 'hunting parson' with the clergy themselves bound into this situation of dependence and deference also presented problems when the living was not a rich one and when clergy were obliged to go down the road of pluralism in order to be able to maintain a decent standard of living. At the bottom of the heap of the beneficed clergy were the unbeneficed and the curates whose poverty and lack of security clouded the lives of many clergy and their families.

The requirement in 1560 that clergy should have a university education<sup>5</sup> improved their status and many were able to farm their glebe and live a life not dissimilar to that of the surrounding gentry. Froude, commented in 1830 that 'the average English incumbent' farmed his own glebe, kept horses, 'shot and hunted moderately and mixed in general society'<sup>7</sup>.

However, there were other forces driving forward the pace of change which would ultimately alter their lives and the nature of their employment. At times when the parson had been the only educated man in a community, he had been looked to for a range of professional services for which it was assumed his education would equip him. Certainly, being literate and articulate he could understand legal matters and offer some advocacy to tenants or parishioners in difficulty. He was expected to have some knowledge of medicine and he (or more probably his wife) would be expected to deal with such ills and dispense such medicaments as were within his understanding.<sup>8</sup> Clergy often sat on the bench and their magisterial role was significant in determining local cases at the start of the century. As a teacher, the parson would and could teach pupils in his house for extra income and as the century moved on and the demand for education increased, he could have control over village schools, appointment of staff and nature of the curriculum. It was understood that the clergy had at their discretion some

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<sup>5</sup> Brian Heeney (1976) A Different Kind of Gentleman, parish clergy as professional men in early to mid-Victorian England (Papers of the Hamden Committee Conference on British Studies at Wittenburg University, Springfield, Ohio) p 6

<sup>6</sup> An edict of 1560 forbade the ordination of ... men who had previously followed menial occupations. In Leicestershire in 1576 15% of clergy were graduates, by 1642 it was 90%. Ralph Houlbroke (n/d) The Protestant Episcopate 1547-1603 p 96

<sup>7</sup> J A Froude (1881) 'Reminiscences of the High Church Revival' in Good Words p 20

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Gatty (1858) The Vicar and His Duties

sums of money to disperse to the poor and needy and the distribution of food, warmth and comfort to the sick and the distressed was again something that was expected from the parson and/or his wife and family. All these facets of his life, as lawyer, apothecary, magistrate, teacher and almoner, in addition to retaining a social connection with his patron and farming his glebe, would seem to leave little time for sacerdotal duties, for preaching and evangelism, for cottage readings or private meditation, prayer and bible study.

There were a variety of forces that brought about the changes that were inevitable in the church as in society. Parishioners came to demand more than a purely amateur provision of services and social change and legislation ultimately removed all but the priestly duties from him.

...no longer was it considered acceptable for a clergyman to be simply a classicist and a gentleman, friend of the squire, almoner to the poor and patron of local tradesmen who had few but the vaguest notions of any distinctly clerical role beyond the obvious liturgical and preaching functions.<sup>9</sup>

It was change over time but, once set in train, it was relentless.

One of the stronger forces to bring about change was that of the religious revivals and the growth of non-conformity and dissent. John Wesley's Methodists had swept across the country fulfilling a need for a manner of worship that did not reinforce social status and position.<sup>10</sup> He had drawn to him working people, poor people, town and country people who not only found they could worship more freely but also that they could have a greater say in how the mechanics of their place of worship were managed and financed. The Independents<sup>11</sup> and the Baptists<sup>12</sup> were also drawing in members and the Roman Catholic Church was enjoying its own revival. It was a quiet revolution that took hold alongside the demographic and social changes brought about by Enclosure, the spread of industry and the move away from a mainly rural economy. The dissenters were able to engage the hearts (and souls) of working people and to use their lack of

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<sup>9</sup> Brian Heeney 1976 A Different Kind of Gentleman, parish clergy as professional men in early to mid-Victorian England (Papers of the Hamden Committee Conference on British Studies at Wittenburg University, Springfield, Ohio) p 6

<sup>10</sup> F L Cross and E A Lingstone (eds)(1978) The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church

<sup>11</sup> E Routley (1961) The Story of Congregationalism

<sup>12</sup> E A Payne (1959) The Baptist Union, a short history.

established building and Episcopal hierarchy to bring religion into the very houses of the people. Bible classes, cottage meetings, open-air meetings all had their place and the non-conformist clergy and laity alike took the gospel with them as they visited not only the sick, but the disenchanted.<sup>13</sup>

To be fair to the Church of England, the success of these methods did not pass unnoticed and they were taken up, especially by the evangelical clergy. In the face of popular radicalism, the emphasis on preaching the word and taking it to the people became a major feature of the church's mission. With the growth of the medical profession and the advance of medicine, an amateur approach was no longer appropriate. The achievement of a literate population was not realised without some anxiety on the part of the landowners that it would no longer be able to impose upon its workforce... 'What is the point in teaching a ploughman to read, it will not improve his ploughing' may have been the cry, but the responses that he might have a life beyond the day's ploughing, that it would improve his ability to know when he was being exploited and that ultimately ploughing might not be all he intended to do, were much more troubling. A village school in the firm control of the parson who was in turn in the firm control of the squire was a successful method of social control, 'using their pastoral office, particularly their influence in village schools, to impede social reform.'<sup>14</sup> The requirement following the decision of a Committee of the Privy Council in 1839 to assign money to public education so that all should be educated, and in 1862, the introduction of the Revised Code with its establishment of inspectors, surrendered some of that control. Similarly, the distribution of charitable doles to the poor of the parish, so long a feature of parish life, was being strongly argued against by forward thinking philanthropists. After 1869, the principles of the Charity Organisation Society were taken up by those who believed that the ultimate helping of the poor would come from enabling them to earn what they received and to have some sense of respect in gaining an income, no matter how small. The requirement for clergy to be represented on the magistrates' bench produced cases which put the clergy squarely at odds with the people as opposed to the other magistrates in whose employment they mostly were.<sup>15</sup> It

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<sup>13</sup> J H Overton (1897) *The Anglican Revival in the Eighteenth Century*

<sup>14</sup> J P D Dunbabin (1974) *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* p 218

<sup>15</sup> See the case of the Ascott Martyrs, 1873, when local women were brought before the Vicar of Chipping Norton in 1873 and sent to Oxford Gaol (in Owen Chadwick (1987) *The Victorian Church* vol II p 309)

was not a comfortable or a tenable position. The trial of the Ascott Martyrs led to the banning of clergy from becoming magistrates.

The whole of the century was one of change within so many aspects of life and the church no less than others. Bishop Blomfield had remarked in mid century that 'in character, habits, attainment, social position and general reputation, the ordinary clergyman of 1860 is a very different being from the clergyman of 1810.'<sup>16</sup> By the end of the century the role of the parish priest was entirely different. He had moved from one service a day and occasional Eucharists, rites of passage and festivals to a weekly timetable of services, meetings and visiting which were amounting to a full-time job. In addition, his wife and family, who were deeply involved in all but the sacerdotal elements of his calling, were operating alongside him in a productive family business, together with lay workers, parish visitors, a choir, weeknight meeting leaders, Sunday School teachers – the list is almost endless and the changes infinite – 'the parson's wife arrived too, as a parish executive; playing the organ, helping in the Sunday School, running the mothers' meeting'.<sup>17</sup>

In order to meet these changes, it came to be recognised that an Oxford or Cambridge degree and the reading of a few handbooks would be insufficient training for the challenges facing the parish clergy. The production of handbooks, by working clergy, did provide some clear instruction as to the duties of a parson, the areas of his responsibility, his statutory and his pastoral duties and even, to a certain extent, his recreation and the kind of company it might be beneficial for him to keep: 'the young lady will scarcely care to recognise as her spiritual guide and friend her partner at last week's ball',<sup>18</sup> but they were instructing at a distance and some more direct tuition and advice was eventually provided in the setting up of establishments such as Cuddesdon which opened its Oxfordshire doors to men destined for the Church of England ministry in 1854. Samuel Wilberforce, its founder, had concluded that 'It is trifling with a serious subject to call the normal undergraduate life a proper preparation for orders'<sup>19</sup> and that the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were falling between stools, neither a seminary nor a theological

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<sup>16</sup> Alfred Blomfield (1863) *A Memoir of C J Blomfield*, quoted in Anthony Russell (1980) *The Clerical Profession*, p 47

<sup>17</sup> Alan Savidge (1964) *The Parsonage in England, its history and architecture*, p 122

<sup>18</sup> Anon (1863) *Clerical Recreations, thoughts for the Clergy by one of themselves* p 11-12



college, no training, no theology. . His quest was for 'clerical tone' and in a sermon to candidates for ordination in 1860, he exhorted them by quoting the seventeenth century divine George Herbert ...

Be sure to live well because the virtuous life of a clergyman is the most powerful eloquence to persuade all that see it to reverence and love, and at least to desire to live like him. ... We live in an age that hath more need of good example than precepts.<sup>20</sup>

The challenge of Methodism and the rise of non-conformity may also have shocked and dismayed the members of the established church. This was not the age of ecumenism and there was deep and strong suspicion and distrust both between church and chapel and between protestant and catholic. A climate of fear and misinformation dominated the relationships between the denominations of the Christian church in England. Strong movements - such as the influential crusade of evangelists Moody and Sankey in 1873 and William Booth's campaign to bring religion to the poor of the East End of London culminating in the setting up of the Salvation Army in 1865 - had their effect on parts of the population not so largely identified with the Church of England. The need for a pastoral outreach and for the implementation of a social gospel became more and more clear and was advocated from a multitude of sources. A decade before, Horace Mann's analysis and comments on the 1851 Religious Census had made chilling reading. He was reflecting on the evidence produced by the census that a large portion of the working population, particularly those in urban areas, were not committing themselves to regular Christian worship.

... it is sadly certain that this vast, intelligent, and growingly important section of our countrymen is thoroughly estranged from our religious institutions in their present aspect.<sup>21</sup>

The reasons for this he attributed almost entirely to social causes, outlined and highlighted by investigative research and publications such as those of Henry Mayhew,<sup>22</sup> and Hippolyte Taine<sup>23</sup> and the illustrations of Gustave Doré,<sup>24</sup> which meant that the

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<sup>19</sup> Owen Chadwick (1954) The Founding of Cuddesdon p 5

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Wilberforce, Lord Bishop of Oxford (1860) Addresses to the Candidates for Ordination on the questions in the ordination service p 198

<sup>21</sup> Horace Mann (1854) Sketches of the Religious Denominations of the Present Day p 93

<sup>22</sup> Henry Mayhew (1862) London Labour and the London Poor

<sup>23</sup> Hippolyte Taine (1872) Notes on London

<sup>24</sup> Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold (1872) London, a Pilgrimage

reading public could no longer plead ignorance of the evils of poverty and deprivation which existed in the cities. Mann spoke of the perpetuation of class differences by the churches through pew rents and a clergy lifestyle totally alien to that of the working class congregation. He identified differences of aspiration and 'far more evidence of middle class ideals than working class responses'.<sup>25</sup> Most of all he condemned the failure of professed Christians to show sympathy for, or offer practical steps to alleviate, the heavy social burdens of poverty, disease and ignorance.

This is not to say that this was true of all Christians or of all clergy but it was a perception, and it was a perception that had been sufficiently strong to have caused this rift. Charles Kingsley, author and vicar of Eversley, told a group of clergymen's wives in 1855 'It is a mockery to visit the fever stricken cottage which your husband leaves in a state which breeds that fever'.<sup>26</sup> Yet John Henry Newman, whose strongly expressed views on ritual and holiness and whose ultimate secession to Rome had shaken the Anglican Church, 'had never considered social questions in relation to faith and had always looked upon the poor as objects for compassion and benevolence'.<sup>27</sup> There was scriptural authority for the idea of the poor always with us but inevitably it could not be separated from the debate between 'faith without works'<sup>28</sup> and the social gospel. Evangelism was possible from the pulpit of any church but, realistically, outreach required something more flexible and the setting up of missions and the university settlement movement, attracted a wide following, not only of potential believers, but also of Christians wishing to be active agents of the gospel.

It was, however, seen by some as a virtue that clergy at Oxbridge were educated alongside learned men and future statesmen. The stimulation of theological debate in those same universities had sown the seeds of Tractarianism and the chapels and quads of Oxford had been silent witness to the battles for Broad Church, ritualism and the social gospel. But, ultimately not all clergy would have to pass through these universities, as provision began to be made for seminaries and training colleges in other parts of the country, yielding to the multiple pressures of the evangelicals, the Oxford

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<sup>25</sup> Sean Gill (1994) Women and the Church of England. p 2

<sup>26</sup> G E Mingay (ed) (1981) Lectures to Ladies at Working Men's college 1855 on 'The Country Parish'

in Alan D Gilbert The Land and the Church in The Victorian Countryside vol 1 p 53

<sup>27</sup> J A R Pimlott (1935) Toynbee Hall, Fifty Years of Social Progress 1884-1934 p 2

Movement and the University Settlements and ever watchful of the power and momentum of non-conformity, particularly among the growing middle-class. If change within the role of the church and its clergy was evident throughout this period, so indeed was the attitude of the people towards organised religion. Whatever 'golden age'<sup>29</sup> there might have been in the 1870s, whatever thin times in the 80s and 90s, whatever disturbance of practices and expectations were occasioned by the shift from rural to urban living, there was also change within the minds and hearts of hitherto worshipping people.

Change had not just come from within the church, or from changes in social conditions but also from the world of science. Darwin's publication of his Origin of Species<sup>30</sup> in 1859 opened up a controversy and a debate that would run for much of the century. Major crises such as wars and epidemics called for questioning about the nature of Providence<sup>31</sup> and the culpability of mankind. Whereas, in 1839 it had been possible for Mrs Stickney Ellis, in Women of England to say that 'amongst families in the middle class of society in this country, those who live without regard to religion are exceptions to a general rule,'<sup>32</sup> the manifold changes in so much of society meant that by the end of the century a minority culture of scepticism had crept in, and seemed furthermore to have acquired some respectability:

In 1888 a bishop declared that you find unbelief everywhere, in your club, in your drawing room. You might hear it from the lady you sat next to at dinner. You find it lurking in a newspaper or a novel.... Parents are asking themselves when children go away "what will my innocent daughters think when they imbibe the poison of infidelity from the first novel they borrow from the circulating library?"<sup>33</sup>

There was indeed a struggle being waged between powerful forces. Earlier in the century some novelists 'believed that they wrote novels as a way of conveying a moral or

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<sup>28</sup> James II v 17

<sup>29</sup> Brian Heeney (1976) A Different Kind of Gentleman, parish clergy as professional men in early to mid-Victorian England (Papers of the Hamden Committee Conference on British Studies at Wittenburg University, Springfield, Ohio) p 6.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Darwin (1859) The Origins of Species by means of Natural Selection

<sup>31</sup> C J Grimley Evans (1995) Divine Providence and epidemic cholera: a contribution to the study of secularization of thought in nineteenth-century England Oxford Brookes University PhD

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis (1839) Women of England. p 36

<sup>33</sup> Magee of Peterborough (1888) in, Sir W. O Chadwick (1970) The Victorian Church Vol. 2. p112

religious message'<sup>34</sup> and this tradition continued in the 'earnestness' of Charlotte M Yonge, but Trollope's clerical characters and those of George Eliot with their visible 'feet of clay' undermined, albeit gently, this strong theme of worthiness. The apparent decline of the church as a major force in society was mirrored in fiction, as it was in church attendance, and in its place, equally strong forces of secularism and doubt, a questioning of values, of the status quo and of those things that had hitherto seemed unchangeable had already begun. In this turbulent environment the role of the church and of the clergy, of people's perceptions and their own image, could hardly expect other than that things must change:

By 1914 they (the clergy) were well on the way to their modern position as rather awkward and rambling professionals, too poor for their social expectations, yet unable wholeheartedly to reject the expectations which have defined this image.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Magee of Peterborough (1888) in, Sir W. O Chadwick (1970) The Victorian Church Vol. 2 p 462  
<sup>35</sup> Alan Haig (1984) The Victorian Clergy.

### 3. Women and marriage

All women are brought up from their earliest years in the belief that their ideal character is the very opposite of that of men; not self-will and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that is the duty of women... to live for others, to make complete self-abnegation of themselves.<sup>36</sup> J S Mill, The Subjection of Women

If this were ever so, then much during the nineteenth century was said and done both to support and most strongly to deny this. It was a century during which women did much to find themselves and to set in train the steep climb from subjection to emancipation which their twentieth century sisters were to attempt to complete. But for all women, just as for all people, truths may be universal but experiences much less so. In some levels of society, being a woman at the start of Victoria's reign was pretty similar to that experienced at the time of her death. The working class woman, whether a countrywoman, a mill-girl or a sweat-shop worker in a city, knew that life was hard, that work and marriage and childbearing and making ends meet were the stuff of daily living. The local vicissitudes of a bad harvest, sickness, accidents, loss of employment through change of management, bankruptcy or strikes, coloured the day as did the national upheavals of war, Free Trade, the Poor Law and industrial and agricultural innovation. Change threaded its way through the century and through the lives of its people. Change brought with it wonderful inventions and life-saving legislation but these filtered but slowly down to the lives of the working class woman.

But it is not with the working class woman that this study is principally concerned, for the clergy have, for most of the time under consideration, been firmly sited in the middle class and so, consequently, have their wives and daughters. For the middle-class girl and woman there was a dramatic difference between the start and finish of Victoria's reign – for principally we are not talking of 'working women' and so the theatre for change was found in the home, in education, in leisure and most of all in expectation. I make no apology for the inclusion of working class women, even though they were not often the provenance of clergy wives, because working class women were their constituency and their parish, the people among whom they laboured and worshipped.

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<sup>36</sup> J S Mill (1991) 'The Subjection of Women' in J S Mill On Liberty and other Essays p 486

Nor do I feel it wrong to have omitted religion as part of the theatre of change for women for I believe history will indicate that it was not.

Having determined what I will exclude let us turn to the fact of being a girl or a young woman at the start of Victoria's reign. Research indicates over and over that life for children at this time was hard, that horizons for girls were limited, that social constraints operated within the middle classes as much as between classes and that requirements for good conduct and morality were reinforced by rote learning, harsh punishments and an ascetic life-style. Most clear among all the writing about middle-class childhood in the first half of the nineteenth century is the difference between the treatment and education of girls and boys. This was the nub of the subjection – that there was little consideration that girls would want, need or require a similar education or home life to their brothers. In this, it is possible to detect a fear of educating women, a concept that women were differently made and had not the capacity for learning or for hard work, and that support of the opposite sex, be it brother, father, husband, son or master, was the most any woman would want to aspire to. We may here wish to speculate how far society's ideal of service departed from the message of the Gospels. The exclusion of Lord and Saviour from this list closes down an uncontroversial and obvious way in which all women might want to serve. But Christ's call to his people to be servants, (and his own controversial interpretation of the role of servant), and to follow his example, did not differentiate between men and women. There is no sex discrimination here and I think this is vitally important as an element of this study.

It might be thought that middle class children had the greater benefit from closer attention from their parents than others. Working-class children enjoyed a short childhood before being inured into the ways of work, whether at home, making lace or minding younger siblings, or in the factory mending broken threads beneath machines or in the ploughed field scaring crows and picking stones. Their parents had little time to amuse or entertain them, their own lives being hard and their energies limited. Children of upper class families saw little of their parents for entirely different reasons and grew up largely in the care and supervision of servants.

The wife and daughters of the church dignitary, the diplomat, the headmaster, the admiral, had a clear a position as the women who had 'married a country house'; ideally none of them would

have spent much time in the nursery or any at all in the kitchen, except to give orders.<sup>37</sup>

Middle class children did still have the close care of servants but parents, or at least mothers, were not so far distant. In all classes, the role of the father would have been much more distant, both his work and recreation being carried out, if not away from the home, then within it, but with an acceptance that the family should not intrude. It was therefore, from their mothers that most middle class children took on the attitudes and expectations that would govern their adult life and for any girl the principal expectation would be that she would marry and have children of her own. What need then of an education beyond that required to fit her for the social milieu that was her lot and within which she would find a husband? A generation after the start of this study the 1851 census revealed the celebrated 'surplus of women' and it became clear that marriage could not be for everyone. It was a clear signal that other aspirations needed to be sought but a signal that went unnoticed in much of society's view of women, education, work and fulfilment.

There may have been a difference of view about whether girls, brought up to feel second best and therefore, inferior and subject to men, might either not achieve because of the implied low self-esteem, or might be better prepared to be the kind of wives and mothers that men and the nation required. In many of the women I have studied, there is not the resentment one might have expected at the treatment of brothers, the sending away to school, the sheltering from household tasks, the general aspirational focus. There is mention of the difference but as part of the expected development of the family. It is not that there were no strong-minded women in my research but, either they accepted how life was, or they achieved despite the accepted way of things. One counter example to this might be Edith Tait, seventh daughter of Archie and Catharine Tait, with one brother educated at Eton and Oxford and a bright and intelligent mother who was by the time of Edith's childhood much caught up in the role of bishop and archbishop's wife, who does criticise the quality of her education, the low standards of their governesses and the fact that her father took less interest in their education than might have been expected.

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<sup>37</sup> L. Davidoff (1993) Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives in Gender and Class p 6

Girlhood then was a time to learn some practical skills, to read, write and have an elementary grasp of arithmetic, to sew, to paint, to dance, to play a musical instrument or to sing, to recite the Catechism, to speak and read some foreign language, to master social skills and be able to carry on a reasonable conversation. Ruskin, in his essay 'Of Queens' Gardens', conspires in the definition of a curriculum of greater depth for boys than for girls:

... a man ought to know any language or science he learns thoroughly, while a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures...<sup>38</sup>

For many girls it meant learning all these things at home either from their mother or from a governess or else from a brother's tutor. For some girls there was the opportunity to be educated, at least for a while, in a girls' school, though there seem many instances of girls being taken away from such establishments without much sense of the need to complete what had been begun. As girls grew, the requirement for them to help their mothers and become involved in their commitments and responsibilities increased. Social calls, charity work, walks, sewing, reading, cards and conversation could occupy many hours. For some girls it was a delight, for others a meaningless waste of time. Sarah Stickney Ellis, a writer who set out to define the role and position of women in the early years of this period, regretted the increased refinement of young women and the death of 'usefulness' (see also chapter on exemplary literature) and Harold Perkin in The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880<sup>39</sup> speaks of 'the rise of 'the perfect lady', the Victorian idea of the completely leisured, completely ornamental, completely helpless and dependent (on husband/father) middle class wife or daughter, with no functions besides inspiring devotion and bearing children'. Not all young women, however, grew up in this hothouse environment. There were as many families whose sense of duty, service and responsibility were the dominant ethos and who eschewed the triviality of such a lifestyle. The church could provide a focus for much philanthropic work as well as devotional activities. Three times to church on Sunday might seem to indicate a very religious family but was probably a more stimulating and encouraging way to spend the Sabbath than sitting at home unable to indulge in even the everyday trivialities and

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<sup>38</sup> John Ruskin (1907) 'Of Queens' Gardens' in Sesame and Lilies. pp 64-65

<sup>39</sup> Harold Perkin 1969 The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 p 159



common tasks. It is no wonder that the prospect of marriage and therefore, the independence to run one's own establishment might appear as the only light upon the horizon.

There were also clergy daughters for whom life was hard simply because of parental poverty. The Headmaster of the Clergy Daughters' School in Cowan Bridge 'had long felt keenly the inadequacy of the incomes of the poorer clergy and consequently the impossibility on their part of providing their daughters with an adequate education.'<sup>40</sup> So this and other similar establishments were set up to teach 'useful' skills of household management, plain sewing and immense self-discipline. If it was a struggle for some clergy to send their daughters away to guarantee a sound education, it was often more of a struggle to supply the funds to have them return at the end of term and there are records of girls remaining in the school throughout the holiday periods for want of the fare home. For them it was a hard life under a hard regime and the published records do not discord with Charlotte Bronte's albeit fictional account in Jane Eyre.

Inevitably this varied and often unsatisfactory state of affairs did not persist throughout the century. There were changes and improvements in the education of working class girls culminating in compulsory elementary education.<sup>41</sup> (This did not necessarily improve the lot of many middle class girls since private education was still not regulated, standards were variable and parental intent held stronger sway than national legislation). By the end of the century some women had broken through quantities of the man-made barriers which prevented their advancement and with their progress and increased self-esteem and confidence came a growing sense of the possibility for all women not to be bound by male constraints or even constraints of their own making, 'netted by invisible rules'<sup>42</sup>. Yet, for all the examples of extraordinary women, of pioneers and champions of new ways, the notion of marriage as the ultimate goal of women remained for society if not for all women. And amongst these women are examples of those whose

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<sup>40</sup> Notes on the Clergy Daughters' School, Casterton (1935)

<sup>41</sup> Forster's Education Act 1870 accepted that basic education was a government responsibility. It was realised that in the setting up of the Board Schools education could only be compulsory if it was free and it took more than a decade to bring this into effect. Elementary education however was for those whose parents could not buy education and many middle class girls were deprived of a satisfactory education.

<sup>42</sup> Naomi Mitchison in Joan Perkin (ed) (1993), Victorian Women p 55

achievements in their own independent sphere were crowned with a happy marriage and children.

Hippolyte Taine, in his Notes on England in 1872, commented that 'an English girl wants to marry only for love.... But in her private romance the English girl is still English, that is to say positive and practical .... She wants to be her husband's helper.'<sup>43</sup> This is a very positive view of marriage and one which accords well with my research. It could find its fulfilment in lower middle-class marriages where the husband was in trade and the wife assisted with the shop or the business. It had a place in some of the professions where a wife might aid her husband as his receptionist or hostess or it might simply be an expression of the wife as supporter, provider of the haven of the home, a protection from all domestic worries, guardian of the 'separate sphere' of the family. It is in this context that images like the 'angel in the house' are conjured up and the wife/mother on the pedestal appears. This particular phrase emanates from the writing of mid-Victorian poet Coventry Patmore whose first wife, Emily, died young but embodied a (male) idyll of an ideal woman and perfect wife<sup>44</sup>. His image of gentleness and selfless giving was undoubtedly a truthful one in many instances but this research identifies few women who really conform to this concept, the image being far more of holiness tempered with practical Christian usefulness rather than women prepared to be worshipped and set apart. The Rev. William Marsh did, nevertheless, acknowledge, after his wife's death 'if we had her back again, we should almost be tempted to put her on a pedestal and worship her'.<sup>45</sup>

However, not all women were secure in happy marriages and it took much campaigning to achieve legislation that would project them from the disasters ensuing from an unhappy marriage. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 set up divorce courts in England and Wales. The Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 conceded that women once married did have some rights. Throughout the century a double standard in terms of sexual experience prevailed and it was due to campaigning by Josephine Butler and others that the Contagious Diseases Acts were repealed and the punitive treatment of prostitutes was outlawed. It might seem that this had been a

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<sup>43</sup> Hippolyte Taine (1872) 'Notes on England' in A Widening Sphere (Vicus ed.) (1977) pp 76-77

<sup>44</sup> Coventry Patmore (1854) The Angel in the House

<sup>45</sup> Catherine Marsh (1867) Life of Rev William Marsh p 173

militant century but these were hard-won victories by a small number of women (and men) who were able and prepared to face up to the less desirable aspects of human relationships. The natural progression from these examples of acceptance that women might have a voice that needed to be heard, was found in the battle for the franchise. In this not all women were united but they were beginning to raise a voice that would not be silenced. Together with advances in women's education, the first women doctors, Poor Law Guardians, campaigners for welfare and housing reform, writers, scientists and women in local government, there was clearly no stopping women's advance and improvement in their status and conditions, even if change was often slow as a result of contestation and of women's own uncertainties about the desirability of change or the direction of progress. But still the stereotype of the weaker sex persisted. Even at the end of the century, women could find themselves locked in loveless marriages and the exclusive nature of respectability could still ostracise them if they set out on their own. There was a lot still to achieve for married women, particularly in terms of women's health and support for the elderly but there was no question as to the broadening of women's lives and the development of choices in the public sphere for them. Middle class women were climbing down from the discomfort of the pedestal to join their working-class sisters. The possibility of marriage as a partnership was coming into sight.

It had been the case that, through expedient or inclination, some marriages had been partnerships; whether through sharing of a family concern, a shop, a medical practice, a parish or a common interest be it philanthropic, political, artistic or literary, couples had worked alongside each other and not observed demarcations of role, precedence or authority. In such instances the woman's own skill or understanding was of sufficient importance to override any separation of spheres. Such women managed their lives and their households in such a way that their skills could be exercised and contribute to the greater good of their cause or calling and, maybe coincidentally, to the greater good of their marriage as well.

But let us not delude ourselves into thinking that this was the generality. While I may have indicated that progress and recognition of the individual value of women increased throughout the century, this was a surge forward which took very much longer to reach the wider constituency of women, wives or mothers. From The Mothers' Union Journal of

1908 comes a verse which may say something about where women were at the end of this momentous reign:

The rights of women, what are they?  
The right to labour, love and pray;  
The right to weep with those who weep,  
The right to wake when others sleep.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lady Dorothy Neville 1908 The Mothers' Union Journal p 59

#### 4. Clergy marriage – a desirable institution?

... 'If the parson would but marry!'<sup>47</sup>

This may have been the exhortation in nineteenth century treatise on the value and variety of the married clergy, but it has its echo in other places. By the time the Rev. F E Paget wrote this in the mid-century, the married protestant clergy had three hundred years of history since the English Reformation of the first half of the sixteenth century. It had not been 'the King's Great Matter' and Henry VIII's quarrel with Rome alone that had brought about the radical reform of the clergy. Luther's earlier rupture with the Church and his challenges to so many of its practices, including the celibacy of the clergy, had influenced Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (who did have a wife) who in turn had been able to carry out considerable reforms. Among them was the obligation to celibacy in the Church of England which was officially abolished in 1549.<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth I was thought to be reluctant to support such a change but clergy marriage became an inevitability as soon as clergy celibacy, having been denied its authority by Luther, was embraced by the newly protestant clergy in England. They found it, in St Paul's words, 'better to marry than to burn,'<sup>49</sup> and believed that it enabled them to perform their changing and developing role with greater understanding. That their well-being might be improved was one aspect, that having a wife might in fact bring added value to their pastoral role was another which, gradually, grew into acceptance and the clergy wife, and thence the clergy family, became a reality.

It is important that this 'new' concept should be understood as such, to lend weight to the great respect given by the seventeenth century clergy to the writings of George Herbert, who set out, in The Country Parson, his blue print for clerical family living (and which continued to be read throughout the period of this study) While much of what was written as guidance for clergy, even in the mid to late nineteenth century, is couched in terms which might serve just as well for an unmarried priest or one whose wife and family were totally disconnected from the business of the parish, Herbert is clear from the

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<sup>47</sup> F E Paget (1856) The Owlet of Owlestone Edge p 118

<sup>48</sup> F L Cross and E A Livingstone (eds)(1978) The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church

<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians VII v 9

beginning that the whole household, comprising wife, children and servants, has a duty to set an example by their manner of living.<sup>50</sup>

In the chapter on exemplary literature, I will address the part played by Herbert in setting down requirements for good living for both priest and family. What is interesting, is that while the Victorian clergy reading this belonged to a rectory culture which had already been defined and understood, the readership at the time of its writing were not in this position, the concept of clergy marriage being relatively new in 1625 when Herbert was writing. The nineteenth century clergy could disregard the anachronistic parts, the need to make of the children 'Commonwealth's men' and the Puritanical suggestions that they be not involved in 'vain trades' which pandered to the devices and desires of a pleasure loving society. However, they were still able to take on the rest of the text and apply it to their very different lives and social situation.

The clergy of Herbert's day were undergoing another transition from that of the celibate to married clergy for their education, or often the lack of it, was also a matter of concern. In Leicestershire in 1576 only 15% of the clergy were graduates though by 1642 the proportion had risen to 90%.<sup>51</sup> The uneducated priest was, in many cases, much more of the people though that which had not changed does seem to have been his poverty. Nevertheless, the seventeenth-century image of the working priest with, similarly a working family remains, particularly in the rural areas with the wife and children joining in such village activity and labour as was required at harvest or other seasons. During the time of the Civil War, much hardship did fall upon clergy and their families as many were deprived of their livings. One such, who knew the humiliation of eviction, was Susannah, daughter of Dr Annesley, a London clergyman and one of twenty-five children, who went on to be the wife of Samuel Wesley, Rector of Epworth and, ultimately, mother of John and Charles Wesley. The difficulties and privations of her early life contributed to her strength and fortitude, such that Dr Southey was to remark 'no man was ever more suitably mated than the elder Wesley... she was an admirable woman, of highly improved mind and of strong and masculine understanding, an obedient wife, an exemplary mother and a fervent Christian.'<sup>52</sup> Another exemplary

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<sup>50</sup> George Herbert (1632) The Country Parson

<sup>51</sup> J A Sharpe (1987) Early Modern England, a Social History 1550-1760

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Timpson (1854) British Female Biography. p 334

woman of the same period was Catherine Mompesson, wife of the Rector of Eyam in Derbyshire, himself replacing an evicted pastor of more Commonwealth persuasion. She remained to support her husband when it was agreed to construct a 'curtain' around the village to contain the plague which had come there from London and prevent its spread among the other villages. Although she defied the ruling by sending away their two children, she remained at her husband's side ministering to the ever-dwindling community until the disease finally claimed her too.<sup>53</sup>

There was inevitably much inequality of provision for clergy in a system that was so diverse and allowed for such varieties of payment, housing and security. It was basically an insecure profession with nothing guaranteed but much expected. Nevertheless, clergy marriage was accepted and even encouraged, providing an addition to the priestly workforce as it had done to the rural community workforce of the past. Non-conformist clergy had different circumstances. They were principally employed by their local church and wife and family were probably more involved as members of the congregation than as a social adjunct. Their position, socially, was much less elevated and within the non-conformist churches, the possibilities for female participation being greater, there was more opportunity for women to take part in services and even to preach. Methodists were called to a circuit and could be moved within it, Baptists and Independents were called to an individual congregation who might, or might not be in a position to maintain them and their families from their own resources.<sup>54</sup> Non-conformist clergy, not having the benefit of glebe or tithe, could however, be employed in other trades or professions which did at least allow for their support and that of their families.

The Anglican clergy identified with the squirearchy resulting from the increased educational requirement for the priesthood and the likelihood of the priest being the only other educated person in a community during the eighteenth century. The insistence that the parson be university educated implied a private income and therefore, a degree of social standing. If the parson was the associate of the gentry, then so were his wife and family. They must come within their social range and take on the restrictions of whom they might visit and with whom their children might play. Roy Porter, in a chapter on 'English Society in the Eighteenth Century' contends that 'The (eighteenth century)

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<sup>53</sup> RMB (1979) The Rev. William Mompesson.

Anglican clergy politicked, tally-ho'ed, fumed and guzzled with the Squires.<sup>55</sup> It was in direct conflict with the notion of a priest for the people. Mann, in his consideration of the depressing outcomes of the 1851 religious census, may have attributed these to the 'moving away' of the clergy from the people they served. He might, however, have come to acknowledge that this separation had been the case for a very long time.

In terms of the education of daughters and, ultimately, wives, throughout my eighteenth century research, there is a recurrent theme of girls seeking education and mothers and fathers both denying it, even fearing it. Catherine Cappe, daughter of a Yorkshire clergyman, endured the departure of her brother to school but commented that her father 'had imbibed the prejudices of that day in respect of the cultivation of the female mind',<sup>56</sup> believed that 'domestic occupations and household duties were the proper province of women'<sup>57</sup> and never taught her a lesson in her life. This was not a totally male inclination, for the aunts with whom she was sent to board, while attending school in order to learn needlework and dancing, shared this opinion. They had a 'great horror of learned ladies' and warned against too much reading, as 'they never knew it come to any good.'<sup>58</sup> Even Eliza Berkeley, most conventionally Anglican of the wives in this earlier study, had encountered opposition when she had wanted to read sermons and attend daily services, (seemingly unremarkable activities for a vicar's daughter,) and yet she too was railed at by her mother ... 'My dear, you will never get a husband; you hold yourself up as a dragon and men like quiet wives.'<sup>59</sup>

Eighteenth century perception of a parson's wife seems to have strayed from Herbert's blueprint and followed some other model. William Cole described the wife of a colleague as a 'very fine woman and a proper parson's wife, visiting nowhere and taking care of her family concerns'.<sup>60</sup> Tindall Hart contends that 'it was unusual for the eighteenth century parson's wife to work in her parish (as her nineteenth century successor was to do) beyond playing the role of lady bountiful and relieving the necessities of the poor.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Minute Book and History of St Paul's United Reformed Church, Bracknell, Berkshire .

<sup>55</sup> Roy Porter (1982) Pelican Social History of Britain p 83

<sup>56</sup> Catherine Cappe (1822) The Memoirs of Mrs Catherine Cappe written by herself. p 19

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* p 53

<sup>58</sup> *ibid* p 53

<sup>59</sup> Eliza Berkeley (ed) (1799) Preface to The Poems of George Monck Berkeley. p 278

<sup>60</sup> A Tindall Hart (1955) The Eighteenth Century Country Parson. p 43

<sup>61</sup> *ibid* p 92



My research does not bear this out, certainly in the lives of the women I have studied in any depth, nor in those about whom I have read. Hart does, however, leave the door open, for he continues 'that Susannah Wesley and Mary Fletcher taught their parishioners was considered a shocking and slightly unladylike procedure.'<sup>62</sup> Sarah Clayton, one of the eighteenth century clergy wives I studied, brought up eight children (five of whom survived) and allowed that, had she been single or without a family, she would have deemed it her duty to instruct in the Sunday School but she did not want to be 'one of those ostriches who run for great distances in the desert and neglect their own brood.'<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, once her children were of an age to be left, she took her full part in the activities of the parish.

What may be the case is that the kind of clergy wife who took no part in her husband's parish affairs is probably not so likely to have figured in biographies or have her own recorded memoir or memorial. Memoirs and memorials are notoriously unreliable as historical evidence, given that they are mostly written by a grieving spouse or close relative, and that it would be inappropriate to say anything that was not wholeheartedly positive following the death of someone loved and missed. However, it is also possible to 'lose' a wife, or at least edit out much that pertains to her as being of not much interest in a biography of a clergyman. Francis Witts was Rector of Upper Slaughter in the Cotswolds from 1808 – 1854. The modern editor of his diaries (90 notebooks of perfectly legibly written work) has attempted to 'reduce his verbosity'<sup>64</sup> by leaving out 'particulars of his day-to-day work ... owing to "a certain dryness" ' and within this exclusion has been almost any mention of Witts' wife Margaret, though there is a curious little comment in the introduction that ' he confided his daily activities to his diary rather than to his wife'. Here is a dilemma, given other lives that I have researched, when even a fully-committed parish-involved wife can pass without notice in her husband's writings and we are all at once faced with the prospect of inconclusive evidence.

Although there were those who continued to present the argument for a celibate clergy, JEC Welldon, in an article in The Nineteenth Century,<sup>65</sup> quotes some curious sources to

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<sup>62</sup> A Tindall Hart (1955) The Eighteenth Century Country Parson p 92

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Timpson 1854 British Female Biography. p 334

<sup>64</sup> David Verey (1978) The Diary of a Cotswold Parson. P 9

<sup>65</sup> J E Welldon (1906) 'The Children of the Clergy' in The Nineteenth Century. Feb. 1906 p 231

support his contention that a married clergy is the best possible arrangement. He is not convinced by Fuller's view in The Worthies of England (1685), that the children of the clergy are disadvantaged by the longevity of their parents at marriage, and thence the lack of ability to cope, due to the need to wait for a living<sup>66</sup>. One of Welldon's principal arguments for the married clergy is the immense contribution that the offspring of clergy marriage have made to the well being of the nation. He did systematic research with the Dictionary of National Biography resulting in the discovery that, since the Reformation, far more children of the clergy have been high achievers on a national scale than the children of lawyers or doctors. He goes on to list prominent examples of those children though inevitably they are (with the exception of Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters) all male! He also quotes a supporter of clerical celibacy (W E H Lecky) who is ready to concede that with the Protestant married clergy it is possible to attain 'the idyll of modern life, the most perfect type of domestic peace'. He continues:

His religious convictions will be revealed by a higher and deeper moral tone, by a more scrupulous purity in word and action, by an all-persuasive gentleness which refines, and softens and mellows, ...in visiting the sick, instructing the young and discharging a thousand delicate offices for which a woman's tact is especially needed, his wife finds a sphere of labour which is at once intensely active and intensely feminine, and her example is not less beneficial than her ministrations.<sup>67</sup>

He goes on at great length to press forward good reasons why the upbringing in a clerical home is superior to any other.

The subtext of research into wives of the clergy seems to be bound up, as this thesis sets out to show, in image and perception. The difference over time seems, however, to be that of different images and perceptions being required, a changing set of requirements, a different sort of woman. Thus one can progress from the uneducated woman supporting a village priest and being a working member of the community, into the exemplary, plain living and devout wife of Herbert's construction, on to the more elevated and socially acceptable but less involved consort and member of the squire's social network. This could then make way for Hart's concept of the Victorian clergy wife:

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Fuller [1658] (1840) The Worthies of England p 79-80

<sup>67</sup> Lecky (n/d) History of European Morals Vol ii, chap v pp 334-5

.. it was left to the Victorian parsonage to turn parochial chores into a family concern. The wife played the organ, visited the sick and old, presided over the mothers' meetings and organised the missionary bazaar in the rectory garden.<sup>68</sup>

The problem with all of this imagery is that as an historical construction, it is incomplete. It is confined to narrow views, or to a wider but much more distant image. It is contaminated with the prejudices of the viewer. Clergy marriage is probably as diverse as are clergymen and the women they have married, but there are strands which are common to almost all such marriages and unite these very diverse women. What is more susceptible to image, (and more quantifiable) is expectation, particularly that of society and therein one can mirror changes over time. There are also situations which carry a timelessness and have a relevance in any century. Knowing about them or having them recorded is then the limiting factor, particularly for all the reasons outlined in other chapters of this thesis, which relate to a wife's sense of loyalty or personal inadequacy in the face of difficulty, even when not of her making. I offer these two quotations as examples of the joy and the misery experienced at either end of the nineteenth century by two clergy wives:

No one who saw only the calm and well-ordered home, the school in which Dr Carpenter's learning and character impressed themselves with uncommon force and beauty, the active pastorate filled with public and private labours of philanthropy, would have suspected what bitter confessions of unfulfilled duty, what mournful utterances of unrealised aspiration, were poured forth in the solitary hours of the wife and mother who took so large a share of the burden.<sup>69</sup>

Contrast this description of the wife of Dr Lant Carpenter of Exeter at the beginning of the nineteenth century with reflections of Louise Creighton, wife of the Rev Mandell Creighton, concerning their time in a Northumberland parish towards the end of the century:

How can I sum up what those Embleton years had done for me? ... They had thrown me more upon my own resources. They had made me think more on religious subjects. I do not remember any time when religion was not of primary interest to me, but here the services of the Church and the work we tried to do for our

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<sup>68</sup> A Tindall Hart and E Carpenter (1959) The Nineteenth Century Country Parson. p 144

<sup>69</sup> J Estlin Carpenter (1879) Life and Work of Mary Carpenter. p 2

people brought it home to me in a new way. I learned much from his sermons myself and loved talking them over with him. ...We both felt ... that these nearly ten years would probably be the happiest years of our life.<sup>70</sup>

This is not to demonstrate change over time but rather to show two women being treated very differently by educated and successful clerics. What these quotations do demonstrate, however, is that the quality of the relationship and the acknowledgement of a shared task or mission was, and remains, fundamental to the happiness of a marriage. It is also an acknowledgement that for some clergy and their wives, their satisfaction and fulfilment came from the sharing, not only of the work, but of the recognition of each other's part within it. Both marriages might have met the criteria set out by George Herbert in his Country Parson but there is an indication here that the partnership needed to reach a deeper and closer level for it to yield a truly happy clergy marriage.

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<sup>70</sup> Louise Creighton (1994) Memoir of a Victorian Woman: Reflections of Louise Creighton 1850-1936. James Thane Covert (ed). p 80

## 5. Images and Perceptions

### 5.1 Presentation – the view in the mirror

'Let us pray to be preserved from the insincerity of biographical memoirs.'<sup>71</sup>

Clergy have a public role. There is no escaping this. The exemplary nature of their calling is, as we have discovered, set out from the moment of ordination, or before in the time of preparation and training. The Victorian clergy family, behind the rectory door, inside the vicarage, within the manse, were saved from the prying eyes of zoom lenses, the intrusive nature of the telephone and email but, behind those doors servants slept, tradesmen called, pupils lodged, relatives visited and there was never total privacy. Their credit was known by local shopkeepers, their income known by squirearchical patrons, their personal habits at the discretion of the house servants and, always, the scrutiny of the parishioners. A 'late' clergy daughter, Noel Streatfeild, hated the Easter offering - felt so exposed by its implicit sense of dependence, of charity.

The Easter Collections were, as was customary, a gift to the Vicar. Sometimes people who could not attend sent cheques and these the family put in the bag, but this Sunday there were none so, though it was intended the bag should pass from hand to hand, nothing would be put into it by any member of the family. The bag reached Victoria first and suddenly the pretence annoyed her so she passed it to the row behind. Her mother was furious, she had always felt embarrassed by the Easter offering for to her it was rather like charity... That Victoria should pointedly underline that the money was coming to them was unbearable and, church or no church, she told her so in an angry whisper.

"How dare you! I shall talk to you about this when we get home."<sup>72</sup>

Respectability one must retain, but pride ... now that is a sin!

So, in exploring image I am concerned with the different views taken of the women in my study, of the way they, as individuals and more generally as a group, were perceived by different people. And this is where this becomes a relevant area of research, for in using contemporary sources, I am attempting to capture a view through eyes long closed in

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<sup>71</sup> Christobel Maxwell (1949) *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*.

<sup>72</sup> Noel Streatfeild (1965) *Away from the Vicarage* p 47

death, eyes clouded or brightened by preconceptions which I do not necessarily share and which my twentieth century eyes may see altogether differently – ‘through a glass darkly’.

One must start with how women saw themselves - their self-image -surely the easiest to explore for its source must be the journals, diaries and letters of women whose words have been preserved and in some cases published. Yet even this personal and private view brings with it an editorial consciousness. To what extent is a diary a totally private document, is there never some thought that it may be read, if not in our lifetime then at our death, and in writing it do we not, at the back of our mind, have some control over how we will appear? ‘The point at which outpouring overtakes consciousness of self is often hard to establish.’<sup>73</sup> Here, however, I believe, having acknowledged the difficulty, we must cease the conjecture and take the results of this area of research at face value.

Writing a diary was a common practice for the nineteenth century middle-class woman - yet one might think there was little then to fill the pages of such a journal. Fine for the extraordinary woman, the explorer, the intrepid adventurer who crossed continents or journeyed to the extremes of the Empire, but daily round and common task, the ordinariness of middle-class life, calls, needlework, household tasks, music, correspondence, and a little visiting of the poor could hardly furnish an eventful or enlightening journal. But that is to take a superficial view for; for many women, the journal was a means of reflection, a confidante, a friend ever ready to listen, non-judgemental and reliably discreet. If, in our century, we can read with amazement, pain and delight the diary of Anne Frank through her years of imprisonment, when she never once stepped outside the confines of her attic in German occupied Amsterdam, then we should not be surprised that women with greater, even if by our view, limited freedom, should use the pages of their diary for their deepest reflections and outpourings of the soul.

The need of many of the women in this study to explore matters of the soul and to reflect upon their own journey on the path of faith was a matter of great consequence. Living with a clergyman, attendance at church, cottage readings or Bible studies could contribute a large theological input. There were family prayers and daily reading of the

Bible but it was the individual's own path towards salvation and beyond which many of these women chronicle in their diaries. Even by the standards of their own time and circumstances, many of them would have been regarded as living a very virtuous and 'good' life and yet here are women struggling with their nature, questioning their own motives and striving towards a better understanding of God, a greater tolerance of others, elevation to a higher plane of service and much of this striving finds its way into journals and diaries.

One feature common to many nineteenth century diarists seems to be the use of their birthday or the start of the year for a review of the year past and a time to set targets. Often this extended to birthday letters to close friends or relatives containing reflections and admonitions far beyond simple birthday greetings. Common to both of these is the idea of the spiritual journey and the need to mark off milestones along its length. Sometimes too, such a medium was used to chronicle a particular personal event, to 'set the record straight' or simply for the cathartic benefit of recording something 'too deep for tears'. Such is undoubtedly Catharine Tait's account of the three week period which encompassed the death of five of her daughters from scarlet fever. The account remained in her husband's possession until after her death when he, in putting together a biography of his late wife and son, felt it would benefit others that they should read it.

Private feeling has suggested my doubts as to the publication of these memories of a mother and son. But on mature consideration it has been decided that the lessons they are calculated to teach are too important for the Church of God to allow them to be buried within the sadness of a home.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, the whole painful and irrevocable process is set down with loving attention to detail and constant reference to the sure and certain hopes of both parents and children in a more joyful and painless afterlife. And yet, even as it is detailed, it is also detached. It allows the reader as near as the writer was prepared to venture. In some ways

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<sup>73</sup> Revel Guest and Angela John (1989) Lady Charlotte. A biography of the Nineteenth Century. p xix

<sup>74</sup> Lambeth Palace library, Tait MS, correspondence with William Benham on biography of Catherine and Craufurd Tait (1879) Vol 99 p 275

Catherine Tait's detachment was enforced, a double agony, for in having just given birth and therefore, nursing her new baby Lucy, she was torn between her needs and the need to tend to her quarantined daughters. She watched from the window the sad processions to the graveside. It is as if, in the mere act of setting down limits for the amount of emotion that could be expressed, for the amount of examination it was possible to bear for these people - her daughters, her son, her husband, her servants, herself - all become characters in a narrative. The agony is there, almost between the lines; the questioning, the anger are not. Maybe they did not exist, but if they did they had no place in this narrative and I believed there was no other surviving journal that recorded them. However, when interviewing Catharine Tait's great-great granddaughter, I learned that there had been another record of these events. A cousin had been staying in the Deanery at the time and she had written her account of what had happened in a much less comfortable fashion than the girls' mother. Although we were unable to find the account itself, my informant assured me that it made very painful reading for it confirmed that the girls did understand what was happening to them, and recorded their pain and distress as well as that of their parents. Readers have taken the mother's account as being the most truthful and graphic narrative and have wondered at her ability and particularly that of the older girls, to accept their fate and the certainty of death with positive views of the afterlife and their ultimate reunion with their Saviour and each other. One could take comfort from this. One would like to think that these children were capable of thinking beyond their own pain. Undoubtedly, on reflection, their mother and those of the family who read the account would have found comfort in that. It is therefore, chilling to have this illusion shattered. One can understand the reason for recording in this fashion and if, as would seem to be the case, it did afford some comfort, then who are we to question it? But the apparent selectivity of the published account does call into question the nature and purpose of death narratives.

I have commented that a diary could be a sympathetic and non-judgemental friend and it does seem that this was something very important for women who were consistently hard on themselves in setting exacting standards that were difficult to achieve. In terms of 'image' many women had a very poor view of self and would have considered anything other to be dangerously approaching vanity or self-praise. Charlotte Bronte considered herself to have 'almost repulsive' plainness. Mary Fletcher and Catherine Cappe castigated themselves on their worldliness. Minnie Benson, wife of Archbishop



Benson, in her troubled catalogue of failures to please her husband, lays all the blame on her own waywardness. The silent receptivity of the journal lacks one attribute of a true friend... the ability to encourage and reassure.

Away from the autobiographical image, much of the research material must come from biographies and memoirs. There is a dividing line here between those who were sufficiently celebrated to have had a biography written about them and those who, though equally loved, were known by fewer people and commemorated, at their death, simply by a memoir written by a son, daughter or surviving partner. This was indeed acknowledged as is seen from comments in the preface to a memoir of his mother of the Rev Thomas Clarke, Incumbent of Wodmancote and Popham, Hants:

In the following Memoir there will be found little, if anything, of that outward character of life which the world usually looks for and admires... The reader will find therefore in these pages no stirring incidents, no striking and remarkable providences, nothing but the humble, unobtrusive and quiet home-path of a devoted servant of God.<sup>75</sup>

Such Memoirs or Memorials, therefore, are the least critical and contribute not a great amount to a woman's image. They are written in a time of grief when only positive comments would be appropriate. Their audience is likely to be friends and relatives, parishioners and fellow-workers. Some chronicle the circumstances of the woman's death in greater detail than the rest of her life. Sometimes a published memoir is the work of a number of people and includes comments and tributes from people beyond their immediate circle. Often the funeral sermon is included, together with excerpts from letters of condolence. More helpful at a time of death is an account from a local newspaper or an obituary which may take a more objective view. An interesting contribution to the image may also be the account of her funeral in the days when these were recorded in newspapers in enormous detail, listing everyone who attended and their connection with the deceased. This can be, at least, an indication of her sphere of influence.

The writing of a biography suggests that a person has led a sufficiently interesting life to warrant its publication. To be written about in one's lifetime implies even greater renown.

For my purposes, the women who were written about in their lifetime were women whose sphere extended beyond that of being the wife of a clergyman. One must, therefore, search such volumes for descriptions which relate to the woman in the particular role that is of interest.

It is important to be able to find within the material some indication of the clergy wife's role, whether it was something that was done 'as well', or whether it was something that conflicted with some other form of activity or involvement. It is not evident that a woman like Elizabeth Gaskell suffered conflict within her household because, with her increasing celebrity, she spent more and more time away from home, in London seeing publishers, about in the country visiting other authors or abroad on the extended trips into Europe which seem to have been so much part of the middle-class expectation. This is in addition to the time spent at home actually writing and providing the required chapters for magazines or meeting publishers' deadlines. It does call into question the ability to fulfil a number of roles: of wife and mother, of clergy wife and of successful author. But is it the conflict of the working wife and mother agonised over in our own century? What, I wonder, were her husband and servants' perception of her ability to manage so many strands? And there is always the counterbalance of the considerable supplement to the family income brought about by the writing.

A conflict which has emerged in terms of the images projected by the two parties within a marriage of each other. I came upon the Reverend Alfred Gatty when exploring the many handbooks written for the clergy in which they list the tasks of the profession together with advice about how to carry out these tasks. In Gatty's book The Vicar and his Duties (1858) he gives a full account of how the translation from rural to urban Britain has involved the loss of engagement of much of the population from the church. He includes sketches which outline different aspects of the clerical life and vocation. However, there is absolutely no mention of a wife within the book, as helpmeet, as co-worker or even as supporter. It caused me to wonder whether the Rev. Gatty had been married. Quite fortuitously, however, I came upon Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing which is the biography of the said Alfred's wife and one of his daughters. From this I learned that their circumstances were very poor and that, during much of their early marriage, Margaret

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Grey Clarke (1827) Memoir of Anna Maria Clarke, wife of Rev Thomas Clarke, Vicar of

Gatty was plagued with problems emanating from their difficulty in making ends meet. The solution as far as she was concerned was to write. Her biographer, (her granddaughter), comments that while she was by nature and inclination a scientist, the only possible and profitable way to contribute to the finances was as an author of popular fiction. She turned out to be quite successful and one might wonder if the reason Alfred Gatty makes no mention of a woman's contribution to the running of the parish was because his wife had been more occupied with her writing than her parish duties. However, the biography goes on to point out that the money she earned from her writing was used to buy blankets for the parish poor and her daughter records her considerable involvement in the organisation and financial management of parish clubs and societies. The involvement was an inherited one, as seen in a description of this same daughter (also a writer) and second eldest of ten children:

Far besides supplying the music, drawing, French, German and Latin lessons required by the younger members of the family, she was the favourite amanuensis and shoulderer of many of the material burdens of the parish.<sup>76</sup>

From the autobiography to the biographies written by close family, husband, children and grandchildren who present a private angle on a public image, one is still in close touch with the subject, having also personal recollection as well as primary source materials, diaries and correspondence to draw upon. These images are inevitably subjective as may not be the case with a professional biographer. It is as if one needs to step further and further back to gain a clearer view. The next step back must bring us to the journalist. This could include the writers of parish magazines commenting on an individual woman's contribution or achievement in an area of parish concern but it is still unlikely to be as objective an image as that in a newspaper or monthly journal. Catharine Tait and Catherine Marsh both 'hit' the national press at the time of the 1866 cholera epidemic in London. Along with Catherine Gladstone, they caught the attention of the press through their efforts to relieve suffering for different groups of the London population. Their achievements and their appeals for help are chronicled in the August 1866 editions of The Daily News, The Morning Post, The Daily Telegraph, and The Times.

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Micheldever, Hants. p viii

<sup>76</sup> Christobel Maxwell (1949) Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing p 156

It is at this point in the pursuit of image that one must move on from the individual to the collective image. How were clergy wives and daughters in general seen by the population, by the parish? Is there a popular view and is it at all accurate? Were these women only viewed as individuals, were they considered separately from their husbands and parents, or, as in some diaries of clergy themselves, were they even considered at all? Was there an image of expectation in the mind of parishioners (or bishops)? There was no doubt an image in the eyes of those closest to them, their servants, resident pupils and curates, but it is unlikely that such an impression was ever expressed in a form durable enough to be of use to the historian. An article heading in a Sunday paper 'Wear a floral frock... without looking like a vicar's wife'<sup>77</sup> indicated that even at the end of the following century there was a collective image, albeit a derogatory one.

In the pursuit of the notion of image we must consider not only the image of the individual woman or even the collective of women but also the image of the marriage, the partnership. This is an even more sensitive plant to nurture in the searing heat of public perception. It is something that presents considerable problems. There is little written by women about their marriage unless it is good. There are few women who, like Annie Besant, have exposed a state of desperately inappropriate and unhappy union to a reading public. Divorce was rare and a divorced woman generally a misfit in society. Therefore, the ties that bound were not always those of love and affection and the admonition to 'suffer and be still' undoubtedly shrouded unhappiness in the rectory as in any household. Marriage was, for some women, a prison but the alternative was to most a terrifying unknown and, therefore, not to be contemplated.

What is much in evidence in both fiction and biographies written by sons and daughters, is any mention of the clergy wife's ill health and the strain this may have put on the marriage and the rectory household. The Rev FE Paget, writer of an 'apology for clergy wives', Owlet of Owlestone Edge comments openly on the toll rectory life can have on clergy wives (see chapter 'Living Pages'), and daughter after dutiful daughter's diary records her need to act on behalf of an ailing or invalid mother. It is to be remembered that if a wife died she could be replaced by a new wife, daughter at home or willing parish helpers, whereas a clergy wife or daughter nursing a husband or father in his last

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<sup>77</sup> The Observer March 16<sup>th</sup> 1997 p 1

days could look forward to a future without any financial provision and almost certainly no roof over her head.

A problem encountered in this pursuit of image is that of the objectivity of distance. Steeped in nineteenth century journals and memoirs, it seems easy to judge and evaluate from their own perspective. The writing seems to set a standard of behaviour. This is reinforced by the exemplary literature, the handbooks, the biographical works and even to a certain extent contemporary fiction. The enormity of stepping outside the conventions as in the case of Anne Besant (publishing an article on her loss of faith, openly advocating birth control advice and provision) or of Lucy Tait and Minnie Benson (living together as a single-sex couple) becomes very real. And yet, if one is indeed applying those contemporary conventions and perceptions, Besant's behaviour is entirely beyond the pale whereas the intense friendship of Lucy Tait and Minnie Benson seems to have been taken at face value and hardly a cause for comment.

This brings one back up to date and the possible conflict of image seen through contemporary and current eyes. On the one hand it would seem totally wrong to judge or categorise any perception of women in the late twentieth or twenty-first centuries when focused on women over a century past. How can one analyse the lives and views of women when our lives and views now are so very different? One can argue for objectivity, for hindsight, for greater knowledge and understanding gained from an accumulation of research and writing which will convey an image of the women of the mid to late Victorian era. Vast quantities have been written about individual as well as collective groups of women, and among them are clergy wives and daughters. There is also, as one may expect, a difference in interpretation between historians. On the freedom of nineteenth century middle class women one can encounter on the one hand an argument for the repressive nature of expectations. Stephen Mintz argues that: 'in some respects, bourgeois women were even more confined than their poorer sisters on whom the dead weight of respectability did not always impinge so crushingly.'<sup>78</sup> Pat Jalland however, suggests that many such women led busy and fulfilled lives and were

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<sup>78</sup> Stephen Mintz (1983) *A Prism of Expectations. The Family in Victorian Culture*. P 67

more contented and had less repressed relationships with their husbands than the stereotypes of Victorian private lives would suggest.<sup>79</sup>

I would contend that few of the women studied in this work have been appropriately dealt with by later historians. A exception, however, is Seth Koven's work on Henrietta Barnett<sup>80</sup> which is both contemporary in its handling of her life, her work and her relationships and also sensitive to Victorian views and images, treating her more gently than some of those associated with her in her later years. However, there is no full and recent biography of a woman who would seem to have been of great significance in her own time and although, later in the text, I discuss her views about her biography of her husband and her feeling that an autobiography would be inappropriate and undesirable, I do find that perceptions of what she achieved and of how she lived and was seen as a clergy wife as well as a social reformer and philanthropist have not been adequately reflected in later accounts.

There remains an avenue of images yet to be explored. Victorian literature contains clergy in abundance and wives too. From the safety of anonymity in fiction, these women's images are more colourful, less obsequious, more questioning but are they more truthful? To what extent do those writing about them draw upon personal experience? Could it be that some such writing is in fact stereotyping the clergy wife or daughter? We are so constantly on our guard against the pitfall of the stereotype but in this case it has a place because it represents a populist view and it is this view that the 'real' women will have had to live. Stereotypes of clergy wives and daughters are rarely kind; they may appear as pale and ineffectual creatures or be gross caricatures but they are, nevertheless, contemporary images. This is something I will explore in the chapter; 'Living Pages' and it is from these myriad images, of both fictional and real women, that I hope to be able to draw clearer pictures of the women who are the subject of my research and the world in which they existed. .

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<sup>79</sup> Pat Jalland (1986) Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914

<sup>80</sup> Seth Koven (1987) Culture and Poverty: the London Settlement House Movement 1870-1914.

## **5.2 Re-presentation – the sample, the source and the stereotype**

One of the first lessons I learned when beginning my research into the wives of the clergy was that it was not alongside but behind his cassock tails that I must find any clergy wife and probably their daughters. It was necessary to identify the man and, thereafter, his wife might appear. This was a frustrating but, nevertheless, revealing introduction to what was to follow for from it one might deduce that these women had no identity that was not that of their husband and his consort. Legally, through much of the period I had chosen for my research, a wife was her husband's property. 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow' meant precisely that when uttered by the bride, including not only her person, her goods and fortune and any money she might earn but also her children. Why then should I be surprised that it was hard to learn much of the identity of a mere 'chattel'?

That this would have been the case for married women, no matter who their husband, was evident but at least the clergy of the Church of England are able to be identified and have some status and recording. They may not achieve high office or great celebrity but the solidarity of their organisation will at least allow their incumbency to be recorded and, following the publishing of Crockford's Directory later in the century, some biographical details to pin them down to a location and identify any publications or preferment they might have had.

Having selected a category of women to examine, a period, a geographical region and an organisational affiliation, it is clear that to examine all women within this category would be an impossibility. Therefore, I decided to pursue the case study approach and to explore the lives of three particular women. However, I did not arrive at making the selection of these women without first of all reading widely about clergy wives and daughters of the period and creating for myself a picture of the kind of women and the kind of lives I was concerned with. The pictures that emerged from this initial research through both primary and secondary sources were inevitably very varied. They embraced women in rural and urban communities, in cathedral close and university city. The time span took me from the reforming days of the early to mid century through the immense upheavals of industrialisation to the last powerful days of the Victorian empire. The spiritual and theological allegiance and experience of the women stretched from the most evangelical and revivalist to the most liberal proponents of the social gospel via the

high ground of mid to late Victorian religious controversy. Amongst the women, I read of lives of great poverty and deprivation as well as lives of comparative ease and material comfort. Some of the women worked actively within the church, some kept a lower profile while they had children to bring up, some had no children and some trained their children from an early age to step into their footsteps.

To draw any clear pattern from amongst such a wide range would seem to be impossible. However, having been drawn to three particular women during this preliminary stage, I found, in researching their lives, that between them they did cover a great many of the experiences I had read about and that their lives were in some sense representative of a great many of their less researched sisters. They lived in both urban and rural parishes, knew the ecclesiastical as well as the academic life, were involved in theological as well as social issues, had known both the nurturing and 'framing' structure of a rectory childhood and the changes required by 'marrying in' to such a household. Most significant, however, in their lives, was their involvement in philanthropy and the pastoral element of the clergy family's duty, the ability to change and adapt to suit circumstances, the love and devotion to husband, father, brother, son (the supportive woman) and, making that support possible, their underlying and irrefutable faith. They 'matched' other women in so many aspects and yet their own lives were distinctive and extraordinary.

It is at this point that the issue of representativeness meets both problem and solution. These women were well known in their own time, through their connections and in their own right. Consequently, their lives are recorded in many ways: in collections of papers in libraries, in published biographies, in the press and in general works about women in religion and philanthropy during their period. All three of them maintained a considerable correspondence. Two of them were widely published in their own lifetime and, therefore, reviewed in papers and periodicals; the third, as wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury, lived a very public life and therefore, was recorded in the press. They also all lived among people who were publicly known and, therefore, cross-referenced in their biographies and papers. They were, in their time, celebrated women and one could argue that such a public profile would make them less representative of their category of women. However, to cite an example here... The death of the five Tait daughters from scarlet fever in 1856 was widely reported and was to some extent the reason for



removing Archie Tait from the Deanery of Carlisle to the See of London, largely at the recommendation of Queen Victoria. In Robert Young's Memories of a Family he comments:

The home into which I was born was lovely. The bishop, who knew my father well, had found a new cure of souls for him after the death of three of his children from an epidemic of scarlet fever, through sympathy with him and his wife for their grief. A change of scene was imperative for my mother's health.<sup>81</sup>

This is one among many examples where individual elements of these women's lives were shared with other women in the category. The elements that interest me, their relationships with their husbands/fathers/brothers/sons, their faith and the faith of their partners, the demands of a parish, the problems of moving on or up, questions of patronage, of the changing role of the clergy and the actual role of a supportive woman are present in the lives of women at whatever level and of no matter how much, or how little, celebrity. Therefore, how these particular women handled these aspects of their lives would not be in any significant way different from women less well known and, therefore, less written about. Family historians have encountered and identified the problem of the separation of a woman's own history:

Whereas historians of the family concentrated their attention on women's lives in a domestic or private sphere in which women continued to be both legally and substantially subordinate to men, historians of women wished to focus more on women's public lives.<sup>82</sup>

Sean Gill, in Women and the Church of England has encountered this problem and has commented that:

... the very existence of written material about a woman tells us that she was exceptional, that she had the leisure and ability to write, and that she lived in a family conscious enough of its heritage to preserve family records.<sup>83</sup>

But, with the women in this study, we are looking beyond the simple maintaining of family records to published biographies or manuscript records in libraries and archives. We are moving into a more exceptional area than he describes, but even so I do not

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Young (ed) (1983) Memories of a Family Oxford: privately printed

<sup>82</sup> A Tilly (1987) 'Women's history and family history: fruitful collaboration or missed connection?' in Journal of Family History *XII* pp 305-315

believe this discredits the material or makes it incapable of representing the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of women who were less exceptional, nor does it preclude the use of such women and their lives as material from which society formed impressions, saw images and gained perceptions. However, there are issues concerning clergy marriage that we do not find in the lives of these three eminently exceptional women and I have tried to deal with these in the section 'Chapter and Verse' under more thematic headings. It is, therefore, the case that while the three women in my study are not typical of all women, I would, nevertheless, contend that what they demonstrate of women's lives is to a large extent representative of a much larger sample of women.

In confining my research to the Church of England, I am moving away from my earlier research which covered nonconformist women as well as Anglicans. My decision to limit this study was inevitably partly to reduce the spread but also because the requirements of Church of England clergy are contained within the laws and statutes of the Church. The Church of England in this period was deeply tied into the changes I mentioned in the preface – the professionalisation of its clergy, the move towards industrialisation and the reduction of influence of the church in the community. The non-conformist churches were, at the same time, facing times of immense growth and revival and there was an increasing tension between the established and the non-established churches in terms of pastoral and spiritual care. Methodism particularly was greatly sympathetic to women, adopting a much more active role and had built up a tradition of strong female preachers. District visiting and the pastoral ministry were greatly developed and encouraged by the free churches though their clergy often enjoyed lesser status in rural communities where Church and Hall still held a relationship of mutual support. The non-conformists had dealt generally better with the move into the industrial towns and cities and in deeply rural villages their chapels appealed to the working classes put off by long held notions of tradition and precedence. Consequently, the role of the minister's wife and daughters was slightly different. There were strong threads in common; an exemplary role, the need to be supportive women who were expected, even more than their Anglican sisters, to be deeply involved in all aspects of religious and social life. It is the question of social life that is important here for 'free' churches can be gathered churches and so the idea of the parish as a geographical area is less defined. Also the social structure of a parish

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<sup>83</sup> Sean Gill (1994) *Women and the Church of England*. . p2

had within it a place for an Anglican priest and his family and with them a series of images and expectations.

Since one of my concerns is 'image' I was keen to concentrate in the area where this 'image' might be easiest to detect. The most telling difference, and the ultimate reason for selecting only Anglican women, was to do with women's role within the church and, consequently, how that impinged on marriage and family life in the rectory or the vicarage. Since women could only operate within the Church of England as worshippers and parish workers, clergy families existed within this framework – the 'framing' of the ordination promise. The role of the wife, therefore, had to be that of supportive woman in the private sphere of the home, or as assistant in the many pastoral functions of the clergy, involving herself almost certainly in all aspects which dealt with women, children and the elderly. She might have imposed upon her, or from choice, a social role as clergy wife, visiting with and being part of the society of the gentry. There would certainly have been, in some parishes, a restricted number of families with whom she could exchange visits. There would not be, however, the kind of partnership which was possible within the nonconformist churches and chapels where a wife might involve herself in the taking of the service, might read in church or even preach. There might be a well ordered structure in place with deacons, elders and visiting pulpit 'supplies' and, ultimately, assistance from the circuit or the wider organisation but basically, local non-conformist churches were self-governing, 'Christocratic' organisations and suffered few of the statutes or organisational and social restrictions of the Church of England. Consequently, the role of the Anglican clergy wife and daughter, having less freedom about it, seemed to me to present a much greater challenge to study and explore.

Having written this, and concluding this chapter which looks at the representativeness of the women in my study, I am aware that being bound by statutes and restrictions is hardly a feature of the lives of any of the women who figure most within my research. But this is not true of all, hence my inclusion of the chapter on Rectory Culture in Part 2 of this thesis, so, while it may be that exceptional women have a means of ignoring, over-riding or just a real or feigned ignorance of these restrictions, there have been some for whom the Church of England, with all its hierarchical structure and its spread of clergy with little or no power or say, has been a strait-jacket to their development, or more to

that of their husbands. It is possible to perceive of wives loving Christ but having rather more difficulty in loving His church. It is one of the dilemmas of the clergy wife.

## 6. Sources and methods

I had been deceived. In researching eighteenth century clergy wives for my MA dissertation, I had thought that because there seemed to be such a lot of available material on nineteenth century women, this would be a much more fruitful period to explore. I was wrong. An apparent plethora of material does not necessarily mean richness so much as more work in the searching and discarding in order to find material of real worth and historical significance.

Nevertheless, it was the material gathered for that dissertation, which provided the source base for this study.<sup>84</sup> That also consisted of a group biography of five eighteenth century clergy wives<sup>85</sup> but the material was presented differently in that the chapters were thematic and dealt with all the women rather than having their own discrete chapters as is the format of this thesis. It was easy to identify common themes, (education, marriage, the role of the clergy wife, her lifestyle and social attitudes), and this I did from not only the biographical works, but also from the wider range of primary sources, contemporary literature, background material and more general secondary sources. I was, at that point, still building up the picture of a married clergy and its history, as well as the general background of late eighteenth religious and social life and expectations.

Inevitably, when seeking information on individual women one comes across the problem of invisibility, a case of '*chercher l'homme*' before '*la femme*'. The immediately obvious sources Who was who? and the Dictionary of National Biography had very little, beyond already over-exposed clergy daughters such as Jane Austen and the Brontes.

Ultimately, it was the Europa Biographical Dictionary of Women<sup>86</sup>, which proved to be the treasure chest from which I was able to draw a shortlist of women from whom, in time, I selected my five. No one in this sample was listed *because* she was a clergy wife but because of what she had achieved in literature or philanthropy or preaching. This, however, proved a more productive route than that of finding first the clergyman and

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<sup>84</sup> Georgina Burrows (1992) The wives and daughters of the clergy in England during the period 1750-1830 Oxford Brookes MA dissertation.

<sup>85</sup> Anna Barbauld (1743-1825), Eliza Berkeley (1734-1800), Catherine Cappe (1744-1821), Sarah Clayton (1779-1840) and Mary Fletcher (1739-1814)

<sup>86</sup> Crawford Anne (ed) (1983) Europa Biographical Dictionary of Women

then looking for information on his wife. This was the real invisibility and it was not confined to the eighteenth century. It was possible to read biographies of clergy well into the nineteenth century in which their wives are not mentioned at all beyond some passing reference to their having married. What is even more distressing, from my point of view, is the existence of clergy *autobiography* in which wives are not mentioned either. Reference is frequently made to things achieved, visiting, ministration to the poor and hospitality and yet men who were undoubtedly married have found it possible to write about their lives and achievements without acknowledging the role their wives must have played. Was it because such a contribution was taken for granted, because it was not valued or that it was regarded as irrelevant? Given my aim to look at image, this absence of acknowledgement seemed to have something fundamental to say about the image of these women in the eyes of their husbands and their husbands' biographers and, as a result, something further to say about any perception the public might have of them.

As has been suggested in the previous introductory chapters, the principal methodology within this thesis has been the positioning of biographical research within its appropriate historical context and viewing the lives thus described both from the perceptions of their time and, in the conclusion, with the perspectives of later analysis and scholarship. The three strands which inform the research; women's lives, the Church of England and marriage within the period of Victoria's reign, interweave throughout the subsequent thematic and biographical chapters, and have as their core and centre the wives and daughters of the clergy. Co-incidental to these strands is the question of individual fulfilment, through personal Christian faith and commitment, through charity and philanthropy as an occupation for middle-class women and through the concept of the supportive woman in a male-dominated society.

Because of my requirement to look at image, I felt it important to consider how women were categorised at the time. There were a number of general histories of women putting them into particular categories. Frances Hay's Women of the Day (1885)<sup>87</sup>, Charlotte M Yonge's Biographies of Good Women (1862)<sup>88</sup>, and a Catalogue of Women Writers make it clear that the categories into which women could be placed were limited

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<sup>87</sup> Frances Hay (1885) Women of the Day

and, therefore, they are most likely to be found under headings of philanthropy and literature, because those were the openings available to them. Women pioneers in the other areas of public life and achievement, education, medicine, the law and politics are more likely to warrant a chapter or a monograph than be sufficient in number for a volume or directory. There were also contemporary and later histories of the church that located the women in their place and time. Georgiana Hill in her Women in English Life (1896)<sup>89</sup> charts the progress of some women from 'the middle ages to the present day'. She covers aspects of women in the nineteenth century in religion – Bible Women, the sisterhood movement, the effectiveness of women in dissenting congregations and as preachers, but also women in humanitarian pursuits, in philanthropy, in medicine (both as nurse and doctor) and women in literature and the arts. They are all valid categories, and they subscribe to the 'changed ideal' which she puts forward in her introductory chapter, that women's sphere is no longer purely domestic. Thomas Timpson in 1854, wrote, as a preface to British Female Biography, that 'female biography must necessarily be of the highest importance to the community, in the education of our youth.' He goes on to chronicle the lives of 'queens, princesses, martyrs, scholars, instructors, poetesses, philanthropists and ministers' wives' because he believed that such a volume would 'be cordially welcomed as a valuable auxiliary to female education in the Divine principles of Christianity.' Among the pious women, he included eight clergy wives but, unfortunately, he does not attribute his information though his sources appear to be letters, memorials and funeral sermons. This renders them at least contemporary but inevitably written in a style which accords little to objectivity. He also takes a long spread of time from Mrs Baxter who died in 1681 to Mary Fletcher and to Sarah Clayton who died in 1840. The latter two have figured in my earlier research, though Mary Fletcher achieved celebrity as a preacher long before she became a clergy wife and continued a life of good deeds and evangelism during and after her marriage. A more famous clergy wife in his list was Susannah Wesley and, while her personal Christian credentials are impeccable, it is as a wife and mother that her story is told. However, the final paragraph takes her, also, into another category.... 'If it were not unusual to apply such an epithet to a woman, I should not hesitate to say she was an able divine'.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Charlotte M Yonge (1862) Biographies of Good Women

<sup>89</sup> Georgiana Hill (1896) Women in English Life

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Timpson (1846) British Female Biography of Pious Ladies p345

Another contemporary collection is found in Jerusha Richardson's Women of the Church of England (1909)<sup>91</sup> and this has proved a valuable source for the current research. Richardson and Hill, however, differ from Timpson in that they are dealing with the concept of 'women' either in terms of change over time (Hill) or in categories of service and achievement (Richardson). Timpson's work is entirely compartmentalised and the interest lies in the fact that he has lighted upon some less celebrated women, in the nature of his choices, and in his biographical treatment of them. Richardson's book appeared only a few years after Hill's and while she adopts very similar chapter headings, the women she refers to are quite different (but include all the three women who form the core of my group biography).

Narrowing the field further, I attempted to secure some contemporary vision of the particular women in my study through other biographical volumes of the day. This is only possible with women with some other claim to fame who, coincidentally, happen to be clergy wives. What these yield is a confirmation of the field in which they flourished – 'philanthropist', 'social reformer', 'writer' etc. – and a mention of their father or husband, whether or not they were themselves more famous or remembered. Although it is only an indicator of those who were celebrated in their day, it does give some idea of the extent of this celebrity and the different slant biographers may put on one person's activities. In the case of Catherine Marsh, she is much mentioned. She appears in Allibone, Cassell's Biographical Dictionary (1867-9), W H D Adams' Celebrated English women of the Victorian Era (1884) Frances Hay's Women of the Day (1885), and in J F Kirk's 1891 Supplement to Allibone. It is to be noted that all these appeared within her lifetime. Cassell describes her as 'the daughter of an English clergyman and remarkable for the warm and practical interest she takes in the working classes'. Allibone himself waxes lyrical on her behalf... 'Let Miss Marsh persevere in her holy purpose – to excite a spirit of Christian zeal which shall go forth to take possession of neglected fields long white to the harvest'. In the later Supplement, we learn that she was the daughter of the Rector of Beddington and that she was educated by her father. In T H Ward's 'Men (*sic*) of the reign of Queen Victoria' she is 'placed'... 'Miss Marsh resided for some time at Beckenham, Kent to the clergyman of which parish her sister is married'.

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<sup>91</sup> Jerusha Richardson (1909) Women of the Church of England



A major source of information and inspiration has been found via the bibliographies of more recent writers who have already examined the material with a different focus in mind. Principal among these were Anthony Russell's The Clerical Profession<sup>92</sup> and F. D. Prochaska's Women in Philanthropy<sup>93</sup>. It is inevitable that there will be common sources in much work which travels along similar lines, though it is to be hoped that it is in the interpretation of the material and its writing up that different perspectives may be discovered. One source common to these, and many others, was the collection of handbooks contained within the Bodleian Library. These books (or in some cases booklets) number a hundred in this collection, are frequently anonymous and predominantly written by and for the clergy. They touch, in most cases, only briefly if at all, on the subject of the clergy's own married life though, ironically, there are often chapters on advising their parishioners about marriage. These books appeared mostly in the early to mid nineteenth century and were ultimately replaced by the greater plethora of advice literature later in the century. However, one particular volume specifically addressed to clergy wives was produced in 1832<sup>94</sup> and this sets out a blueprint for a perfect clerical marriage. Its anonymity is frustrating since it would be of great interest to know the gender of the writer but I fear we may conclude it was a man. It is to be wondered if any woman would set down such immensely high standards for herself and her sisters.

The other principal benefit of the bibliographies of these books was the listing of biographies and memoirs of individual women. There are countless numbers of these, revealingly many with pages still uncut, giving accounts of the (often short) lives of women who lived, sometimes happily, as wives of clergymen. They had children, a powerful faith, financial means to enable the publication of such a volume, considerable good works and almost always a 'good' death. Written as most were, just after their death, mostly by a grieving husband, the content is inevitably subjective and unremittingly positive. They nevertheless exist as a set of texts within which there are still differences and which highlight some aspects of the clerical expectations. Using these same bibliographies, I was also able to locate the lives and memoirs of clergy. Some of these were written by their wives who, modestly, fail to mention themselves

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<sup>92</sup> A Russell (1984). The Clerical Profession

<sup>93</sup> FD Prochaska (1980) Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century Britain

(with the celebrated exception of Henrietta Barnett's Reverend Samuel Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends ) but there are also biographies and more especially autobiographies of clergy whose wives just do not figure at all. In the 'Diary of a Cotswold Parson of F.E. Witts (from which, in my edition, most references to his wife and other inconsequential material have been edited out) one could draw a picture of women of no great significance (see Section I, 4, p 35). His editor describes him as a 'squarson' in the heyday of the upper class clergy. In the introduction to this version there is much about his wife's connections but 'Margaret seems to have been something of an invalid and Francis Witts did most things without her.'<sup>95</sup>

In an attempt to seek a view of how clergy wives were seen within their locality or as a category of women in the rural community I read Arthur Tindall Hart's book The Eighteenth Century Country Parson in which he intimates that the role of the clergy and, more especially, his wife would be found to be different in the following century. His description had not been true of the eighteenth century women I had previously researched but it did give me some hope that in stating that their role was different, there might be more acknowledgement and more credit given to the role played by the nineteenth century clergy wife. This, as I have indicated, was not universally true. Clergy wives are mentioned in a great many books covering the nineteenth century rural community but in most cases it is a tantalisingly brief mention and rarely benefits from as much as a paragraph.

My principal researches into primary material have been into the Tait Papers in the Lambeth Palace Library – this has been a most fruitful and at the same time moving and daunting research project for almost all the correspondence is there between Archbishop Archie Tait and Catharine, his wife. Reading such a personal interchange of letters can leave one feeling voyeuristic. This is not material written for the purposes of later reading by complete strangers and yet, in releasing material for his chaplain to write his late wife's biography, it is evident that it was these letters that were used. It is the most extraordinary chronicle of a loving relationship. Inevitably there were far fewer letters once they were married but there is also correspondence with other friends and family members, letters to Mrs Tait from other clergy and a massive correspondence of letters

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<sup>94</sup> Anon (1832) Hints to a Clergyman's Wife

of condolence and memory at her death. Practically, they are not an easy read, particularly the family letters, where all the Victorian idiosyncrasy of writing 'economically' between lines and in spirals adds to the difficulties of deciphering 'flowery' hands. Nevertheless, the letters are a precious source, augmented by the collections of newspaper cuttings, visitors' books, holiday diaries, sketchbooks and commonplace books that enhance the emerging picture of a family. Reading these alongside the published biographies was immensely instructive but also made the more poignant by the finding of unpublished prayer diaries and other notes. It is this material that presents a problem, even though all the writers are now dead, for although not 'sensational' in a tabloid sense, there is an ethical issue here about reproducing material that would never have been written for publication. There is a sensitivity here, too, to the fact that Catharine Tait was not really a public person in the way of Catherine Marsh and Henrietta Barnett. Her biography is her husband's memorial to her and, although her daughter Edith who became wife of a subsequent Archbishop has her own biography, (Edith Davidson of Lambeth),<sup>96</sup> this is also written from within the cathedral close. It is only Catharine's daughter, Lucy, who achieves some sort of later comment and analysis because of her relationship with another woman, Minnie, wife of Archbishop Benson. Twentieth-century conclusions have been drawn, particularly by John Tosh,<sup>97</sup> about their relationship but the material I have been dealing with is of an earlier, more innocent era and its interpretation underlines the difficulty faced by many historians of reading nineteenth century relationships with twenty-first century eyes. There is, however, much within the manuscript sources, which supports his perception of their relationship together with commentary from biographical works of the Benson children.

Where the Tait papers do provide riches is in the possibility of reading primary material alongside contemporary newspaper cuttings and published work. There are endless possibilities for the enrichment and colouring of the picture, as in an account of a 'grand' dinner at Lambeth Palace, an invitation card, entries in the Visitors' Book and pencil notes in a journal (obviously kept to inform the kitchen about who would be in to dine) placed alongside a written account of such an occasion in the biography and mentions in complementary accounts by other family members in their own memoirs. Among these

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<sup>95</sup> David Verey (ed) (1978) The Diary of a Cotswold Parson p9

<sup>96</sup> Edith Davidson (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth

are Tait's own biographies,<sup>98</sup> those of his daughter Edith<sup>99</sup>, his chaplain and son-in-law Randall Davidson<sup>100</sup> and his sister Charlotte, Lady Wake,<sup>101</sup> as well as in Sitwell, Selfe and Benson biographies, written all from different degrees of distance and with different or corroborating perceptions of the same people and events.

Much of the material concerning Henrietta Barnett is housed in the Barnett and Toynbee collections at the Greater London Record Office. This is a vast collection, principally of correspondence between Canon Barnett and his brother, but also containing sermons, lectures, notes, holiday diaries and photographs. It is this material that was used principally by Henrietta in the construction of Barnett's 'Life'. More material is to be found at the Fawcett Library, the British Library of Political Science and in Tower Hamlets public library. None of this is at all systematic; it consists of a mixture of correspondence and newspaper articles over a wide number of years and subjects. The material in the local history archive at Tower Hamlets is the most satisfying in that one has a sense of being in the right place and of the material being 'reflections' of the Barnett's life and impact on that community. There is an immediacy in the newspaper cuttings glued into scrapbooks, the articles in obscure magazines and the pencil written marginal notes that one does not find in an 'organised' letter collection. There is also no feeling of intrusion in reading from these collections; rather that they are public and, certainly in the Tower Hamlets library archive, 'celebratory' in a way that the Tait letters are not. Here, there are personal elements and touching and delicate areas which add a little to that covered by Henrietta's own biography of her husband.

For background and support of my image of Catherine Marsh, in addition to her own published writing, I looked to work on one of the subjects of her concern and interest, the British navy. These men, as they laboured on the construction of first canals, then railways and roads, and eventually vast housing projects for the new urban workers, comprised a nomadic community, always on the move between work sites. Their relationships with each other and with the static communities into which they came as

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<sup>97</sup> John Tosh (1999) A man's place: masculinity and the middle class home in Victorian England

<sup>98</sup> A C Bickley (1883) Archbishop Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury, PT Marsh, (1969) The Victorian Church in Decline, M J Peel (1989) The London Episcopate of A C Tait.

<sup>99</sup> Edith Davidson (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth

<sup>100</sup> GKA Bell (1935) Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury

<sup>101</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) (1909) Reminiscences of Charlotte, Lady Wake

temporary residents, were often troubled and it was to these men that Catherine Marsh was drawn in the early days of her 'mission'. It has been useful, therefore, to call upon contemporary and modern sources which have described their situation and her place within it.

It would be impossible to deal with these sources without addressing the principal published biographies which have been so crucial in providing a framework for the additional research. The biographies of my three main subjects were written, not so much as objective histories, but as memorials of someone recently departed whose life and influence was felt by those commissioning or writing to be of such a value that it would be instructive and inspirational for all to read.

Catharine Tait shares her biography with her son, Craufurd, who died five months before her. It was commissioned by her husband, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and written by his chaplain William Benham. The principal sources for it were the Archbishop himself, his family and the papers and correspondence already mentioned. Although there is a major section on Craufurd, the majority of the book relates to Catharine, and includes the narrative written by her recounting, in painful detail, the period surrounding the deaths of five of their six daughters from scarlet fever during a nightmare three weeks in 1856. It became, posthumously, her 'ministry of consolation', and, from correspondence received, would seem to have been a source of comfort to other similarly bereaved families. It is a book about a family and, because of the high profile nature of the family, augmented by biographies of all the other main players as mentioned above.

Catherine Marsh is written about by Lucy O'Rorke, her niece (though, more nearly, her adopted daughter since following the death of her mother, the child, Lucy, was more-or-less adopted by her aunt, Catherine). Once again it is a family chronicle but with more concentration on the many interests and good works of its subject. It has no credited sources though references are made to diaries and there is considerable correspondence which increases as time goes on because Catherine Marsh was a prolific correspondent. An additional complement to this was her own biography of her father but no one else within the large and predominantly clerical family seems to have warranted a published biography.

Henrietta Barnett was her husband's biographer, but his 'Life' is as much hers as his and she refers to this in her introduction. It is strange that she, who was such an immensely independent woman and who continued to be a public figure and achieve much after her husband's death should have made a statement that seemed to preclude any further biography of herself.

My friends often ask me to write my reminiscences, but I do not do so for many reasons. For forty years....I spent my life with Canon Barnett, and in writing his biography, I had perforce to chronicle much in which I was concerned.....I have all my life felt honoured by the close co-operation between my husband and myself, and have no wish to disentangle it now and as I had to tell of these activities in his "Life", it is neither possible nor desirable for me to write my biography or deal with them again.<sup>102</sup>

She, too, was concerned that his life should be appreciated and recognised by a wide readership and distributed copies widely to schools and colleges at her own expense. While there is no subsequent biography of herself, she has been largely written about in the press, in church magazines and material relating to her later achievements, predominantly the building of Hampstead Garden Suburb. There is much more objective and critical material concerning her than the other two women. Some extensive research into this remarkable marriage has been done by Seth Koven as part of his doctoral thesis and also forming the core of several articles about the nature of their relationship<sup>103</sup>.

It had not seemed likely that there would be any opportunity for oral history, given the period I have been researching. However, I was wrong. In Davidson's biography of Tait he mentions a great-granddaughter, Mrs Colville. Thanks to the kind offices of the Librarian at Lambeth Palace, I was able to get in touch with this lady, living in Wiltshire, and to visit her. Her father was the only son of the Tait's youngest daughter, Agnes and the Rev. John Ellison, and therefore, she is the only Tait great-grandchild.

Consequently, she has the care of the majority of Tait papers not deposited at Lambeth and a quantity of portraits and memorabilia. Mrs Colville was born some years after her great-grandmother's death but she had memories of her great aunts as well as personal accounts of visits to Lambeth and Fulham, since one of them resided there as wife of a

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<sup>102</sup> H O Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, His Life, Work and Friends pp vi-vii

<sup>103</sup> Seth Koven (1987) Culture and Poverty The London Settlement House Movement 1870-1914 Harvard University PhD

subsequent Archbishop of Canterbury. Her letter collection was more personal; drawings, childhood notes, photos from the family but also from more glittering names, Gladstone, Disraeli, Queen Victoria. It was refreshing to have such a close but nevertheless unsentimental view of someone previously only described in such hagiographic terms

Similarly, the visiting of sites can contribute an additional dimension to one's view of a life. This contribution is not necessarily appropriate to an academic thesis but it does furnish a framework for contemplation of the life of someone with whom one has become, over a period of years, remarkably familiar. One might argue that the feeding of the imagination is not an academic exercise but I do believe that the sight of Elmdon Church where the Taits were married – so very small and rural in comparison with the later glories of Canterbury Cathedral, the orderly grandeur of Rugby School, the heavy and sombre architecture of Lambeth Palace, the grim red sandstone of the precinct of Carlisle Cathedral, (backdrop to such a personal tragedy), does add something to the study of the primary and secondary sources.

Throughout this research, a number of key texts have influenced the direction of my searching. Prime amongst them must be George Herbert's A Country Parson. (see p 31 and 125). I came upon it as a source of influence to others, initially Anthony Russell in his history of English clerical life The Clerical Profession<sup>104</sup> (see p 30). He refers constantly to the immutable good sense of the admonitions in the book. He also refers to other clergy who have been similarly influenced and who have quoted him as good role model. Herbert's book lived beyond its time for it was reprinted throughout the nineteenth century. There are other books which have undoubtedly influenced clerical thinking during the period, their names crop up in biographies as well as in histories of the period. Among them are Evans' The Bishopric of Souls<sup>105</sup> and JJ Blunt's The Parish Priest, His Acquirements, Principal Obligations and Duties<sup>106</sup>. I have searched these books, sometimes fruitfully, for indications of how the pastoral ministry was to be carried out and what should be the involvement of the family and particularly the wife. There

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<sup>104</sup> Anthony Russell (1934) The Clerical Profession.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Wilson Evans (1842) The Bishopric of Souls.

<sup>106</sup> J H Blunt (1864) Directorium Pastorale: Principles and Practice of Pastoral Work in the Church of England

proved to be a circularity in this area of research (each recommending the other and almost all referring to George Herbert), with only Herbert and Legh Richmond writing at any length about wifely and family expectations, but I felt it important to know what the clergy were reading at the time. I shall deal in another chapter with the wealth of exemplary literature available to women but amongst that genre must figure Margaret Muloch's A Woman's Thoughts on Women (1858).<sup>107</sup>

Apart from private papers one must also search among previously submitted theses not only to avoid duplication but also to seek other perspectives on the subject in hand. Among these should be included Peel's thesis and later monograph on The London Episcopacy of A C Tait, Seth Koven's research on the settlement movement<sup>108</sup>, Ruth Hillyer's social history of clergy wives<sup>109</sup>, McClatchey's study of Oxfordshire clergy,<sup>110</sup> Spedding's thesis on wives of the clergy in four denominations<sup>111</sup> and, more recently, Midori Yamaguchi's thesis (begun and completed during the period I have been writing and researching) into Victorian clergy daughters.<sup>112</sup> Two published works – Margaret Watt's The Parson's Wife in English History<sup>113</sup> and F E Christmas's 1950 volume on The Parson in English Literature<sup>114</sup> have also provided valuable avenues to explore.

As outlined earlier, my plan in this thesis was to research some women in some depth and a quantity of others in whatever aspects seem to have been important to them. Three major women have dominated my research, and within their lives and their surroundings there has been a diversity which has enabled me to cover a wide range of experiences and situations which were relevant to clergy families over this period of time. Research into other women has yielded information on specific areas of concern and it has been possible to use the three principal women as reference points for this data. In

<sup>107</sup> Margaret Muloch (1858) A Woman's Thoughts on Women.

<sup>108</sup> Seth Koven (1987) Culture and Poverty The London Settlement House Movement 1870-1914 Harvard University PhD

<sup>109</sup> Ruth Hillyer (1970/1) The Parson's Wife in History (in the field of social history) King's College, London MPhil

<sup>110</sup> Diana McClatchey (1960) Oxfordshire Clergy, 1777-1869: A Study of the Established Church and of the Role of its Clergy in Local Society. Oxford University DPhil.

<sup>111</sup> Janet Spedding (1975) Wives of the Clergy: A Sociological Analysis of Wives of Ministers of Religion in Four Denominations Bradford University PhD.

<sup>112</sup> Midori Yamaguchi, (2001) Unselfish Desires: Daughters of the Anglican Clergy 1830-1914 Essex University PhD.

<sup>113</sup> Margaret Watt (1943) The Parson's Wife in History

<sup>114</sup> F E Christmas (1950) The Parson in English Literature



the cases of Tait and Barnett, it was necessary to read as much about their husbands as it was about themselves. With Marsh, apart from material on her father, it was her own published writing which informed the base material. Since image and perceptions are major elements in my study, I attempted to find other contemporary views of them. This was not difficult but neither was it always productive because of the nature of such writing. Better images are glimpsed between lines than in laudatory articles or memorials. However, Tait and Barnett had their husbands to whom they sometimes had to justify their actions and Marsh had a close friend who fulfilled the same purpose. Of the three, only Barnett comes in for anything like harsh criticism for her forthrightness and abrasive nature (though not from her husband). Archbishop Tait and Canon Barnett did suffer themselves at the hands of the press, and more especially the religious press, but that would have been inevitable given their positions and their desire for reform. Bringers of change in any generation make as many enemies as they win friends.

Research into other women has been carried out, both systematically and by intuitively, following leads. Biographies of clergy have sometimes been helpful, names in bibliographies sometimes yielding further life stories. Keyword and subject searches have also been fruitful. Some of the most interesting material has come from following up references to books read by the subjects themselves and commented on in their memoirs.<sup>115</sup> Letters are slightly different from diaries and journals in that they were definitely intended to be read by someone. With a correspondence, there is also the one-way nature of the letters which can present a problem since one is often having to surmise what was said in between two letters. In Canon Barnett's life-long correspondence with his brother, there are hardly any 'in-letters' – presumably his brother deemed it more worthwhile to preserve the writing of his more celebrated sibling. In the Tait correspondence, there are both in and out letters but, since they wrote almost daily to each other, responses do not necessarily follow on letter to letter. These letters become very much more akin to journal entries for they are a baring of the soul and an exposure of self that does not necessarily crave an answer or a response. What Archie Tait and his daughter, Lucy, also have are prayer diaries which were almost certainly not written with a view to anyone else reading them and need handling with sensitivity.

A significant source has been the British Library newspaper collection at Colindale. Not only has this contained all the obituary material on the women but also their own correspondence through the letter pages. More interesting than the major national newspapers have been the specialist papers and magazines which have reported the same events or articles but from different perspectives. It was important to look out for all Anglican papers. The Clerical World, Family Churchman, The Church of England Newspaper, The Church Times were standard works but there were also female orientated publications like The English Churchwoman's Own Paper. The problem with all of this material is the effusive manner in which it is written. The prose is almost entirely 'purple' and presumably to the taste of the readership.

It would be wrong to totally exclude visual images of women – but there seemed to be very clear demarcations within this section. In terms of paintings, there were portraits and, in a time before photography, etchings and silhouettes as well as sketches and commissioned works. Most of these seek principally for a likeness and the clues that come with them are in the dress, background and any accompanying objects, pets or other figures. Apart from Catherine Cappe in her Puritan style cap and collar, most of the pictures seem to indicate women outwardly very like any others. There is no greater demureness of attire, no more severe hairstyle, no religious jewellery evident that is not present with any other woman of the time. Even with the advent of photography, the material available consists mainly of portraits in standard poses. Larger family groups conjure up an impression of the family gathering that would have occasioned such a photograph but they are inevitably very stiff and static. They seem to tell us very little, unless to show an external conformity.

As if moving from fact to fiction, the more interesting pictures are the detail filled genre paintings of the late nineteenth century, but the wives of the clergy do not figure largely in these, except as 'ladies bountiful' visiting cottages or dying estate workers. More interesting are illustrations to current fiction. There was a small band of illustrators who provided the pictures for many of the mid – late Victorian novels and, especially, the instalments in monthly magazines. Here one has the image of a person constructed

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<sup>115</sup> e.g. references in Catherine Marsh's biography to a work on 'single blessedness', shared also with Florence Nightingale (see page 193 footnote <sup>100</sup>), Tait reading Blunt (and enjoying Oliphant for recreation), Richmond, Bridges, Wilberforce and Paget all reading George Herbert.

from the word picture within the text, together with an artist's perception of any such woman in such circumstances. More sharply drawn are the women in cartoons and caricatures and here an image is being created in order to illustrate a particular point. The nature of caricature presupposes a stereotype and it is with our stereotypical image that we live; clergy wives and daughters being no safer from the cartoonist's pen than their clerical husbands and fathers.

Another rich source is that of contemporary fiction and I intend to dwell upon this principally within the chapter on women in literature. However, it is important to recognise that fiction can provide good background information and, in some cases a slightly more objective and accurate view of how some lives were lived than the hagiographic writings of closely-related or recently-bereaved biographers. If one is attempting to discern what it was like to be the wife or daughter of a Victorian clergyman, it is not difficult to find examples of such women in novels of the period. Inevitably the author will take a particular slant on his or her characters, but, where they are major participants within a novel (such as Catherine in Robert Elsmere or Margaret Hale in North and South), they are allowed to move from the stereotypical into a deeper representation, and to give insight into some of the tensions that govern life within a vicarage. Given that many nineteenth century novels do represent life in middle class society, it is hardly surprising that the clergy and their families, who were a significant part of such society, should figure within such writing. It is also telling that, in the later part of the century, when the emphasis on the sacerdotal and pastoral role of the clergy had become more defined and eclipsed any notion of their social standing, the incidence of the clergy family in the novel decreases markedly.

There are also ostensibly fictional works, written with a particular purpose in mind, either as evangelical works or in order to make a point about a single issue, such as the poor pay and conditions of much of the clergy. Such books were generally produced anonymously but add strong support to correspondence in the clerical press, Crockford's prefaces and advertisements, and research by eminent historians on clergy poverty.<sup>116</sup>

It has been important to me to use current and recent analytical sources in order to place the women in the theoretical context of their historical period. Similarly it has been

essential to make considerable use of the contemporary analytical sources because within them are found some of the perceptions and images which were relevant to the women in this research. My work, using both these frameworks, does present a different view of the women in Victorian clergy households from that of others using similar subjects for research for although a great deal of other work has been done looking at the lives of Victorian women generally, or of the church, or of women in philanthropy, none has dealt in depth with the image and self- and public perception of the clergy wife in this period. As mentioned in the preface, the two women who have researched clergy wives have viewed and presented them from quite different perspectives.

Margaret Watt's tracing of the historical context of the clergy wife deals in a straightforward manner with their emergence as an adjunct to a Reformation clergy, suffering vicissitudes of status and acceptance throughout the turbulent years of religious reform and estrangement from Rome in the Sixteenth century and continuing, mirroring changes of status, until the mid twentieth century. She takes a general view encompassing a long time-span and, publishing during the Second World War, does not make use of feminist or post-feminist theory. Like FE Christmas in his review of the clergy in literature, she devotes a chapter to literary interpretations and identifies the rich and colourful resources these provide for the historian as well as the reader.

Janet Spedding devoted her research to a contemporary (1970s) view of clergy marriage from the point of view of the women themselves. Her analysis treats on the problems and questions implicit in not only the marriage relationship but also the relationship between the women, the church, the parish and their own personal faith. Writing as she did, as a sociologist and in an age when openness may be more encouraged than hitherto, she is able to pinpoint those areas where women felt the relationship to be different from others, more intrusive in terms of personal space and weighed down with heavy expectations and pressures from a number of sources. Davidoff and Hall, in Family Fortunes, dwell in some detail on the lives of some clergy families and have the benefit of the later sociological and feminist analysis but their spread is among non-conformist as well as Anglican families and is part of a much larger work on the development of the middle class family.

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<sup>116</sup> e.g. Rosemary O'Day, Felicity Heal and Christopher Hill

Since I wrote this, (as previously noted), Yamaguchi's thesis on Victorian clergy daughters has appeared. This emerges much more from a sociological than an historical tradition, but while she addresses some of the same issues, they focus principally on the father/daughter relationship and the imposition by the clerical father of gendered ideas on his family. What we both share is an interest in the concept of duty but while we both interpret much of what the women we have studied did as a means to empowerment, her interest is with the clarification of class distinctions and notions of gentility. Inevitably, since she has chosen daughters to research, the question of marriage is not a major focus whereas it is my principal area of interest. My reason for including daughters is that I see them as part of the picture; women within the clergy household sharing much of the expectation and exemplary lifestyle but with, ultimately, a life choice to be able to go or to remain. Daughters are bound by the promises of their fathers, as wives are by those of their husbands in terms of the ordination service, but wives have also their own marriage promises to contribute to the 'ties that bind'.

Another essential has been to acknowledge that research into clergy wives (and daughters), cannot be done in isolation from research into the Church of England and its clergy. Fundamental to a study of the women, has had to be a view of the men in their lives, and in addition to this, Christ and the Church in the lives of these men and, therefore, these women. It is not a simple relationship; it is fraught with interwoven complications and inevitably it has been necessary to chronicle the development of the role of the Anglican priest and of the Anglican Church throughout the period. In looking at 'women in the Church of England' one has to be careful to differentiate between women involved socially or theologically within the church and women who were there by dint of their marriage or family association. Sometimes these two areas do overlap, in that many, probably most, clergy wives, if not daughters, were devout Christians and would have expected to teach, to minister, to evangelise and even to preach. However, this is not the same thing as women having a vocation to work within the church, as visitors, preachers and teachers or working voluntarily for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom on earth.

More important in looking at modern commentary is the treatment of the debates on separate spheres, the role of women within society generally, the middle class, the social structure and the general emancipation of women in terms of work and fulfilment. Sean

Gill, in Women and the Church of England writes of a 'golden age for clerical family life' in the period before the slump in agricultural prices in the 1870s when there was some stability in the rural community. He comments also that 'no where, too, was the complementarity of the sexes within patriarchal family structure seen to better effect, with wives and daughters the enthusiastic agents, through Sunday School teaching and parochial visiting of the spiritual authority vested in the clerical paterfamilias.'<sup>117</sup> This scene-setting for such women is, however, further coloured by his less positive conclusion that 'such women were expected to have no independent existence of their own, but to be incorporated into the profession of their husbands, albeit in a secondary capacity.'<sup>118</sup>

Such comments get to the heart of any debate about the nature of clergy marriage. One is aware that it may be inappropriate to generalise in this way and that it is essential to look back and interrogate primary sources to see if they support such conclusions. Once more, one must come upon the question of balance and to consider whether, and to what extent, the women in this study would have been considered to have been incorporated in a secondary capacity into their marriage, their family and their relationship with the parish and the wider community. This is where the study of particular women, as in this research, is most important in testing statements and generalisations from modern historians.

The three women, Catharine Tait, Catherine Marsh and Henrietta Barnett, who form the central focus of my research, are described principally in the three chapters on their lives but they also provide a standard against which much of my research into other women is tried. Although they have all three been the subject of a major biographical work and were all written about in their time, there has been little, if anything, written about them in the last seventy years<sup>119</sup>. I feel that their lives deserve a greater attention and a revisiting within an early twenty-first century context. Preceding these chapters are a series of six shorter chapters looking at aspects of the lives of clergy wives and daughters which are important but which do not emerge to any great extent within the biographical chapters. I

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<sup>117</sup> Sean Gill (1994) Women and the Church of England (from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day) p 139

<sup>118</sup> Sean Gill (1994) Women and the Church of England (from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day) p 139

<sup>119</sup> with the exception of Seth Koven's thesis on the Settlement Movement in which he features both Henrietta and her husband Samuel Barnett.

felt it important to include a chapter on 'rectory culture' and the great diversity of experiences of clergy families through time, location and theological inclination. Within this chapter, I have considered the different kinds of women who became clergy wives and also the similarities and differences between their lifestyles. Akin to this is the question of clergy poverty, an issue which does not appear relevant in the three main chapters but which was a significant feature in the lives of many clergy and their families. A further chapter reviews some of the advice literature which was available for women, for the clergy and, to a much lesser extent, their families. It is within this area that the prescribed image and the considerable expectations both of the man and his family are uncovered and explored. An inability to live up to such expectations forms the subject of the chapter on dysfunctional marriage and the pain suffered by men and women failing to match expectation with performance.

Finally, in this section, in addition to the chapter on the impact of fictional writing on our knowledge of these women and their lives, is a chapter dedicated to daughters and sisters of the clergy. Catharine Tait and Catherine Marsh were themselves clergy daughters but there are a great many more whose lives were similar or totally different but who shared a childhood and a set of influences which were to dominate all of their lives.

Preceding this section of six chapters are the brief introductory chapters which address the social and religious context in which the lives of all these women are fixed by history. I was aware that, in examining the lives of these women, whether in depth or in generality, their historical context was an important item to be addressed. I determined that their history was influenced not just by the social and political changes which flooded through the nation during the nineteenth century, but also by the history of the Church of England, its relationship with other religious bodies and the secularisation of the people. This historical context includes also the history of women, of their emancipation, identity and self-perception, their relationship with men, with other women and with their faith. This substance is essential if one is to see beyond the image and understand the perceptions in Victorian society of the clergy wife.

## Part II Chapter and verse

### 1. Rectory culture in a 'golden age of clerical family life'

In the passage ascribing this 'golden age' to the 1870's Brian Heeney writes that:

Many of those most actively engaged in church work were the wives and daughters of the parsonage, and the period before the slump in agricultural prices in the 1870s was – not only ecumenically but also pastorally – something of a golden age for clerical family life.<sup>120</sup>

This passage also sites the parsonage firmly in the countryside, a country rectory in a rural community still, apparently, relatively secure within an ongoing social structure. And yet the urban parish had been a fact of life for some generations; the Bishop of London's quest to build new churches and establish new parishes had already happened, and the findings of the 1851 Census about church attendance had already given the statistics which had marked the change, not only of the demographic pattern of Britain but of its relationship *vis a vis* regular Christian worship. The gold was, in fact, already beginning to tarnish.

The idea of 'rectory culture' itself would suggest an image true to all rectories, together with a perception of a way of being, a source of influence, a set of expectations of a group of people within a community. It suggests a set of common experiences for this group of people or extended family, headed by the rector or vicar (presumably also the curate in some circumstances) living in a substantial tied residence alongside the church. This family would consist of a wife, their daughters and those of their sons who had not yet gone away to school. There would also be live-in servants and some coming in daily from the village. In addition, there might be visiting relatives and resident pupils if the incumbent was supplementing his income by teaching the sons of other families or preparing them for Oxford or Cambridge entrance.

The lives of all members of this household would run according to the requirements of the head of the family and, in some respects, it would have been very little different from

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<sup>120</sup> Brian Heeney (1976) A Different Kind of Gentleman, parish clergy as professional men in early to mid-Victorian England (Papers of the Hamden Committee Conference on British Studies at Wittenburg University, Springfield, Ohio) p 6



that of any respectable middle class family in either town or country. Standards of behaviour would be expected and attendance at meals, at family prayers and at church would have been taken for granted. Even within middle class families, there would have been variations, depending on personal commitment, as to what social events would have been acceptable, some lay families, as well as clergy, having very strict views on balls, dancing, social visiting and the manner in which the family presented itself to the world outside. Similarly, clerical families have also varied in these same ways:

During one of the Rugby vacations, the master (Archie Tait) took his young wife (Catharine) to St Leonards, and there was a ball in the house in which they were visiting. It was the first time she had seen such a sight, and she broke out in admiration. Her husband came up in the midst of it. 'Come, let us try' said he, and immediately flew round the room with her in a waltz. 'Oh it was delicious!' she said.<sup>121</sup>

while Catherine Marsh and her sisters were being actively dissuaded by their parents from attending balls or theatres:

I had felt some wish to go to this ball, but I was so touched by his (her father's) love and his loving gift (a gold chain), that I felt quite ashamed of my wish, and I never remember having such a desire again.<sup>122</sup>

These differences are what I think is essential to this chapter. I believe that on the one hand there were patterns of life common to all engaged in the business of being the family at the parsonage but that the variations of experience between families, and particularly, between the women in those families, were very great indeed. It is the nature of these differences which I wish to explore because I believe they provide much of that which refutes the image and the stereotype. It is not, however, to set them up in direct comparison but rather to illustrate the ways women and their families responded to the conditions in which they found themselves, the demands, the perceptions and the expectations.

In F C Moule's 'Memories of a Vicarage' he describes his mother:

When in 1859, the pupil period was over, her loving activities were set free in a new way for the parish. She had already been

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<sup>121</sup> William Benham (1879) *Catharine and Craufurd Tait*. p 233

<sup>122</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) *Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh* p 5

a devoted superintendent of the girls' Sunday school, friend of every scholar as well as every teacher. Now a work of incessant domestic visitation was developed,.. in the course of which... she came to know not only every house but well nigh every room in the Parish, as the loving and beloved friend of all. No weather, however, wet, windy or cold, ever interfered with the literally daily round.<sup>123</sup>

Harold Anson's mother, spent much of the twenty-two years of her husband's rural incumbency 'on a sofa' (where she) 'gave birth to fourteen children', but in 1869 'she recovered her health and had nearly fifty years of active and useful life'. He comments on her ability to:

run a great household, to prescribe and weigh out medicines for a village, to talk fluently in two or three languages, to be all that men seek from a woman in the way of encouragement and sympathy and inspiration.<sup>124</sup>

But the involvement was in many cases much more varied than simply teaching children on Sundays and visiting parishioners – in almost every memoir, biography or journal, from wives of Archbishops of Canterbury to the wives of humble curates, there are mentioned clubs and societies to cater for not only religious matters, catechism classes, Bible reading groups, prayer meetings but also a whole array of self-help groupings for various sectors of the community. Inevitably, but not exclusively, they were run by women for women because so many of them had to do with management of the household economy and that was so frequently women's province. There were clubs where domestic skills were taught and practised: sewing bees, Dorcas societies; clubs to encourage thrift and where possible saving, provision for misfortune, sickness, accidents and death and the more mundane putting by of small amounts of money for coal and the expenses of childbirth. That such clubs should be introduced and run initially by clergy wives is remarkable in some instances. Here is an area where the clergy daughter-become-wife had some advantage, for she would most probably have had some preparation for this (depending on the nature of the parish in which she had grown up); but for the woman 'marrying in' to the clergy household, from more affluent circumstances, her middle class and better educated credentials would hardly provide

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<sup>123</sup> F C Moule (1913) Memories of a Vicarage p69

<sup>124</sup> Harold Anson (1938) Looking Forward p 7/8

her with the skills required to help and instruct those who had been 'making do' and managing already for half a lifetime.

There is another element to this matter of image and expectation which was undoubtedly difficult for women marrying into a clergy household. It was not so much the expectation of the husband but that of the parish or at least its workers. Martha Sherman, wife of a Reading clergyman at the beginning of the period of this study recorded her own feelings and the pain that such expectations might bring to a newly married clergy wife:

It is very difficult for persons of courageous spirits, or for those whose lengthened labours in spiritual services have rendered them almost a habit, to understand the timidity and struggles which a delicate and hitherto untrained mind experiences in its first effort in any public work for God.<sup>125</sup>

She continues to recount her experience on the first Sunday after her marriage, when she went along to the Sunday School to see if she could help:

A lady who had generally superintended the female school, and who united in her character piety, zeal and perseverance, very heartily welcomed her, and expressed her joy in 'finding the minister's wife willing to assist in training the children for heaven'.

"It is all very new to me, and I shall have to learn of you; I have never taught in Sunday School before."

"Indeed," was the answer, with a very significant "hem" which conveyed more than it expressed.<sup>126</sup>

Not unsurprisingly it is recorded that she returned home 'with a broken heart and wept'. She felt a 'deep sense of deficiency in the qualifications she thought the cause of Christ required of a minister's wife'. Similarly, this lack of experience in the face of parochial expectation dogged other lives. Louise Creighton, in her husband's first parish records:

What I disliked most about the parochial life was the Sunday school teaching .. We used to wake on Sunday morning with the sense of a weight hanging over us.... but it was the conditions under which we had to teach and our inexperience... made the real difficulty. We knew nothing of the methods that have since been developed.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Rev Sherman (1848) *The Pastor's Wife*. p 36

<sup>126</sup> *ibid* p 31

<sup>127</sup> Louise Creighton (1994) *Memoirs of a Victorian Woman*. . p 64

This lack of awareness or preparedness was not restricted to women not brought up in the parsonage for in the Memoir of Louisa Maria Statham, daughter of a Presbyter of Llandaff, her husband records from her diary:

Brought up in total ignorance of all the different sects and parties in the religious world I was led to cherish a high veneration for the establishment, and when, afterwards, I learnt that there were such people as dissenters, I considered that none but the very ignorant were found amongst them.<sup>128</sup>

However, even among those with less limited views, the role of the clergy wife was not always understood, particularly by the clergy themselves, as recorded in this description of his parents' early marriage by a subsequent Archbishop of Canterbury:

Like many girls, her education had stopped short when she had married my father as a young girl. She told us once that, having come under a triumphal arch back to the Rectory as the Rector's bride, she had a very lonely life for some little time. My father was engrossed in his work and in his reading, and she herself, to break the monotony, used to do little mathematical sums to keep her mind engaged. Yet she had a great deal of relevant knowledge of all kinds, and could use it, and control a situation by the shrewdness, the quietness, the gentleness and the understanding of her judgement.<sup>129</sup>

If, as would appear, from George Herbert onwards, there was an expectation that wives would tend the sick, administer medicine, prepare women for childbirth and train the servants for service in other houses as well as looking after their spiritual advancement through confirmation classes and Bible study, then it is to be wondered at that there were not more volumes of advice literature designed for the instruction of the clergy and their wives on the many aspects of the wife's role. The (anonymous) author of Hints to a Clergyman's Wife, or female parochial duties, practically illustrated, the only handbook I have found specifically written for clergy wives, acknowledges that not all women may have the necessary medical knowledge and advises that wives get hold of 'Reece's Medical Guide'. In the matter of childbirth, the author further suggests that she should avail herself of several sets of childbed linen, together with the following pack of useful items kept ready in the 'poor room' of the parsonage:

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<sup>128</sup> Rev John Statham (1842) Memoir of Louisa Maria Statham. p 2

<sup>129</sup> W Purcell (1969) Fisher of Lambeth. P 28

- paper of groats
- handbell
- ½ lb of soap
- bottle of castor oil with doses for mother and child
- Tract no 195 of the Religious Tract Society – 'To a mother on the birth of a child'<sup>130</sup>

Louise Creighton was a wife unprepared who, nevertheless, acquired skills in medical practice simply by being there and having to do something practical. Her equally ill-equipped husband, in his first parish, 'handed out home-made elixirs on occasion, the larger the bottle and the nastier taste, the better the medicine was thought to be'<sup>131</sup>

Louise herself took on the task of acting as unqualified nurse and physician when 'a little book giving directions how to treat ulcerated legs' came into her possession. She cleaned and dressed a woman's leg over a long period and found herself able to treat 'milder cases which it was possible to cure.'<sup>132</sup>

These 'serious' instructional roles were only part of the requirement for, in many parishes, the entertainment and recreation of the people could also fall into the lap of the clergy family. There was, inevitably, a social and recreational element in the interaction between clergy family and parish. It was, after all, the social milieu in which most of their lives were lived and the absence of the rectory family would have been unthinkable at such events as harvest suppers or festival picnics. Catherine Marsh's family chose to do something more in their attempt to woo the parish away from the temptations of Derby Day and Epsom Races by setting up alternative entertainments, food and cricket matches, to provide something more wholesome and less destructive to the family pocket than the inevitable temptations of gambling at race meetings. (see more detailed account in chapter on Catherine Marsh).

However, on the subject of entertaining as a family and, in particular, accepting and returning hospitality, there were other difficulties inherent in some families. Problems arose from the difficulty of making many clergy budgets stretch to entertainment of guests on a scale that would be seen as neither mean nor over lavish. Less sensitive is a picture painted by Thackeray of the Rev. Bute Crawley and his wife in Vanity Fair with

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<sup>130</sup> Anon. (1837) Hints to a Clergyman's Wife, or female parochial duties, practically illustrated. p 78

<sup>131</sup> James Covert (2001) A Victorian Marriage. p 112-113

<sup>132</sup> Louise Creighton (1994) (James Covert ed.) Memoir of a Victorian Woman p 64

the astute Mrs Crawley 'wisely giving her husband full liberty ... he was welcome to come and go, and dine abroad as many days as his fancy dictated, for Mrs Crawley, being a saving woman, knew the price of port wine.'<sup>133</sup> The parents of Catherine Cappe, in earlier research, had declared a refusal to accept any meals or hospitality because of the impossibility of returning it. Georgiana Thompson, wife of the Suffolk clergyman, Henry Thompson, is recorded as always being in some sort of financial distress because of her desire to entertain at a level well beyond the limitations of her husband's income<sup>134</sup>.

This touches on one of the extreme sensitivities of rectory life and the question of the social standing and, therefore, expectations of and on behalf of parsonage families. There seems to have been an immense mis-match between perceptions and reality. In Horace Mann's review of the 1851 Religious Census, one of the reasons given for the apparent failure of the church to engage with the mass of the populace was based on this perception of clergy prosperity and the suggestion was contained within his book that things might have been better if 'those who introduced the message of Christianity were less removed in station and pursuits from those whom it has sought to influence'.<sup>135</sup> And here is yet another misconception, for Mann speaks of 'pursuits' and there is in that an assumption that those pursuits (hunting, dining out, entertaining) were a measure of prosperity. I believe the problem is only too clear here; that there was this mis-match between perception and reality and that, while families like that of Catherine Cappe's parents dealt with it head-on by accepting their limited means and living accordingly, there was for many families a feeling of expectation that they should conform to an image of prosperity which put them comfortably alongside the gentry in their community.

Alfred Gatty was a clergyman of excellent education and charming manners – a social acquisition to the neighbourhood. Unfortunately he had not sufficient means for consorting with many of the gentry.<sup>136</sup>

On an annual stipend of £57, it is not surprising that there were limitations to his social interaction, particularly with a wife and ten children to support. William Marsh, father of Catherine, is reported to have managed (greatly assisted by his wife) to deal with the

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<sup>133</sup> W M Thackeray (1848) Vanity Fair

<sup>134</sup> Dorothy Thompson (1969) Sophia's Son: The story of a Suffolk parson.

<sup>135</sup> Horace Mann (1854) Sketches of the Religious Denominations of the Present Day.

<sup>136</sup> Christobel Maxwell (1949) Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing. p 67

dilemma of hospitality and maintaining the necessary portion of clergy disposable income which was meant to be available for charitable giving.

... he used 'hospitality without grudging' on a scale which his income could hardly have met, but for the careful, though generous economy and simplicity with which my mother ordered her household, for the sake of never narrowing the margin of her husband's numberless gifts to the needy in various classes .... Scarcely one third of their income was consumed by their household expenses.<sup>137</sup>

If the country parish began the century at least secure in its social structure, there were other elements that were to change it and, therefore, the lives of those resident in the parsonage. The requirement for a university-educated clergy had changed the social position of some clergy, raising their status, though not necessarily raising their income. It had meant that the parson could easily be the only other educated man in the community apart from the squire. In the absence of a rural middle class, this separation of the church and hall from the village found little possibility of an alternative and so the requirement for the clergy to be the social companions of the hall remained. A difficulty then arose if the clergy family were of the opinion that socialising in the form of dancing and hunting were not for them. A further difficulty could arise with regard to the patron of a particular living. While Lady Catherine de Bourgh may loom large in the fictional world of Jane Austen<sup>138</sup>, there was, nevertheless, a grain of truth in the need to satisfy and please those who had made the living possible in the first place or who might be influential in its retention.

If the rural parish remained a long time secure in its social understandings, this was not the case in the town. The parish could be large and the parishioners numerous but they might not see themselves in any relationship whatever with the clergy. Owen Chadwick, historian of the Victorian Church of England remarked that

the labourer in his smock expected to go to church. The labourer in his cheap black suit did not, though not merely because he affected a new costume.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Catherine Marsh (1867) Life of Rev. William Marsh. p 149

<sup>138</sup> Jane Austen (180x) Pride and Prejudice

<sup>139</sup> Owen Chadwick (1970) The Victorian Church Pt II p 154

The expectations of the wives and families of urban clergy however, did retain some of the same features. Thrift clubs, coal clubs, sewing groups, confirmation classes and Sunday Schools were as much a feature of the town as the country. With larger parishes and parish churches, larger congregations might assemble and there would be choirs and men's and women's groups during the week. Mary Eyre (whose father and ultimately her husband were rectors of St John's Wood) saw this as a burden:

We still continued to get up every sort of amusement for the young people: what a tax these things are – it has been truly remarked that parishes nowadays have become rival places of entertainment.<sup>140</sup>

But across London, in Whitechapel, Henrietta Barnett was finding yet more ways to become involved in the secular as well as the religious life of the parish. There was much correspondence at this time about the inadvisability of taking a wife to live in the middle of such a clearly unhealthy and challenging environment. Indeed, it would have been an entirely inappropriate place for a conventional or sheltered wife wishing to carry on gentle pursuits but this was not the nature of Henrietta Rowland. She had already served her apprenticeship in the work she had done with Octavia Hill and it was with the view of taking on a challenge together that she and Samuel Barnett were able to meet the inevitable difficulties of their time in the East End..

The Barnett's interaction with their East End parish was far more inclusive than might have been expected in many more conventional parishes. Their quest for an holistic improvement in the lives of those around them did not stop at the vicarage door. Meetings and social gatherings were held in the vicarage itself and the photograph of the Whitechapel drawing room shows a room furnished for a large number, rather than for cosy seclusion. Refreshments were served, but of a fairly frugal nature, so as not to embarrass visitors with excessive largesse. The Barnetts' list of activities, begun or encouraged for their parishioners, was long and extensive. Education was at the heart of their thinking and all manner of classes existed in the church buildings throughout the week. In addition, the formation of the Whitechapel Art Gallery and the innovation of opening such an enterprise on a Sunday so that the working population could enjoy cultural as well as spiritual pursuits in their limited leisure time, met with some

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<sup>140</sup> Mary Richardson Eyre (1904) My Youth up until now Ch. 3 p 27



antagonism but, nevertheless, they persisted. Their belief in the benefits of fresh air to promote a healthy life for all was further evident in the campaigns for children's country holidays, for support for shop and servant girls, for the rescuing and moral restitution of prostitutes as well as high quality provision in entertainment and the encouragement of libraries and classical concerts in the church, calling on the goodwill of their range of artistic friends and contacts.

In a chapter on the varying lifestyles of clergy wives, it would be foolish not to include some mention of the matter of preferment and the manner in which some women dealt with it. As I have previously stated, it is not a 'given' that any sort of elevation will ensue once a man is in Holy Orders. Indeed, for many, this would not have seemed appropriate, whether because they were sufficiently satisfied with their lot to remain in one or two parishes for a lifetime, because their gifts were not those which made elevation a likelihood or because they were not, in fact, 'career parsons', and were content to fulfil the simple life of a country clergyman. These attitudes shaped the aspirations of their wives and the kinds of demands that would be made on them. However, there are clergy in this study who were undoubtedly ambitious and sufficiently able and determined to pursue a career which would take them into more and more challenging areas of engagement. For the wives of these men, every promotion meant an adjustment and increasing or different demands. It is likely that they were consulted in the decision-making but, thereafter, the onus was on them to adjust appropriately to the new circumstances.

One rather surprising incident is recounted in the biography of Randall Davidson at the time of the selection of a successor to Archibald Tait, his father in law, as Archbishop of Canterbury. The decision of whose name to offer to the Prime Minister and thence to the Queen for approval had to be made between two principal contenders, the present bishops of Truro and Winchester. Since the Queen viewed her Prime Minister Gladstone's tending-to-High-Church inclinations somewhat askance, it fell to the late Archbishop's chaplain to be instrumental in making the choice for her. Both men had much in their favour but there were other determining factors. Bishop Benson of Truro was known for his High Church credentials (in contrast to the Broad Church position of Tait). Browne, of Winchester however, while he fitted the bill in terms of his allegiances,

and was by his own admission, Tait's own choice for his successor<sup>141</sup>, had known some ill health and was an older man. Davidson had tried to talk to Mrs Browne and elucidate from her some view as to her husband's ability to withstand such a strenuous position. He concluded, in his report to the Queen: 'Mrs Browne is unable to form a clear opinion as to the bishop's physical capabilities for the post, although on the whole she would look hopefully to his being able to do it.'<sup>142</sup> As a result of this report, the Primacy was offered to Benson. It is not recorded that they interviewed Mrs Benson at this time. Such a practice astounds in these days of correctness and transparency. One would suppose that the clergy concerned felt that in interviewing the wife one would not be compromising the confidentiality of the medical profession. Inevitably one can imagine that many wives of men on the brink of immensely demanding promotion might have welcomed this opportunity to intervene or to put a personal point of view. What is not known is whether, at any time, Browne was aware of this interview taking place. Certainly it is recorded in Browne's own biography, written after his death. It does, however, acknowledge the position of a wife as someone with important information even if it does suggest to modern eyes an immense intrusion into personal integrity and privacy.<sup>143</sup>

Both Catharine Tait and Minnie Benson followed a progression from schoolmaster's wife to wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Edith Davidson, Tait's daughter had probably more training to take on the role of Primate's wife because her whole childhood and adult life, until her marriage and beyond, were spent in a Bishop or Archbishop's palace. It was 'framing and fashioning' on a grander scale for life with a successful man in a very public position. It contained all the aspects of diplomacy and political understanding that such positions entail but, at the same time, the need to preserve a calming sanctuary from the demands of office, while also having a home available for official entertaining. Their lives were even less private and even more scrutinised than other clergy wives.

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<sup>141</sup> This is certainly the contention in Davidson's biography but in a recent (1998) biography of Benson, although one reads 'It was generally supposed that Dr Harold Browne,..., would be chosen to succeed Archbishop Tait and he the himself had half expected to receive the call', nevertheless, this same biographer quotes Tait himself as saying, on his deathbed, 'The bishop of Truro (Benson) will come forward and do a great work'. Geoffrey Palmer and Noel Lloyd (1998) Father of the Bensons. The Life of Edward White Benson, Sometime Archbishop of Canterbury. p 99

<sup>142</sup> Sidney Dark (1929) Archbishop Davidson and the English Church. p 22'

<sup>143</sup> Queen Victoria evidently had no qualms about using wives to provide sensitive information on their husbands as when Catharine Tait was invited to Buckingham Palace after one of Tait's illnesses 'in order that she might have the latest personal information about the Archbishop's health'. A C Bickley (1883) AC Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury (abridged) p 79

Catharine Tait certainly felt she had a considerable responsibility in her position to set a good example to other clergy wives. She never let up on her own personal commitment to carry out workhouse and hospital visiting but she saw in the matter of national crises, such as the cholera epidemics, a clear role for herself, not just as supporter of her husband, but as one able to take on a much more managerial role because her position allowed her to do so. In so doing, she enhanced not only her own position as a woman taking action but also that of her husband – both of them reflecting approval and recognition upon each other.

There was also an aspect of the position of wife of someone in high office which she and other bishop's wives fulfilled, that of mediator, taker of political temperature, breaker of bad news or essential advice. While many were daunted at the prospect of approaching the bishop, his wife presented a more accessible face (or ear) for matters of delicacy. The truth about the Tait's son's terminal illness, the Bensons' communications about their son's death were handled by the wife, supposedly the stronger, as if the demands of the Episcopal role were too demanding to be able to handle personal tragedy at the same time. These men looked to their wives for strength and strength they received, but not without considerable cost. These were women, like many others in elevated positions, who probably knew more than was reasonable for them to know, but bore these burdens of knowledge alongside their husbands.

While, as we have discovered, some clergy wives began their marriages as wives of schoolmasters, Louise Creighton began hers as wife of a university don. In the stimulating academic climate of Oxford and Cambridge, there were inevitably many clergy. Fellowships for married clergy were, however, a rarity but, in 1871, Merton College, Oxford changed its rules to allow four of its fellowships to go to married men, among them being Mandell Creighton.<sup>144</sup> Life in a university city was socially and intellectually immensely rich. It was possible to be at the heart of great debate and great controversy. There was, as mentioned in a following chapter (see p113 note 198), a possibility for tension and rivalry to arise between the demands of a college and a family (colleges seeing themselves as as much family as any man should need). Churchgoing allowed the possibility of finding a local parish church or attending university sermons by

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<sup>144</sup> Louise Creighton (1994) *Memoir of a Victorian Woman*. p 158

celebrated preachers. The inevitable clergy wife task of visiting the poor could be exercised, as indeed it was by Louise Creighton, by visiting some of the poorer streets of the city but it was entirely different from the parish ministry. When her husband was offered a living in a rural parish in Northumberland, the prospect was not looked upon with any great enthusiasm by Louise. She feared the isolation and the lack of congenial society. She entered into a lengthy postal debate with her husband, who was visiting his proposed parish. His arguments, inevitably, stem from his own perspective and aspirations:

You say you like Oxford society more than I do: I grant it: you are younger, and have not had so much of it. I have long felt how trumpery it is ... an interchange of things meant to be clever but not containing much that is real or true. It is more pleasant to talk over schemes of education in a drawing-room than to work them out in a poor parish; and 'society' gives you all the advantage of looking very wise and very good without much cost of actual effort.<sup>145</sup>

Another of his arguments was his own desire for peace, in order to be able to write. He had commented once that life in Oxford was like trying to live 'in a house which always has the workmen about it.'<sup>146</sup> They moved to Embleton in Northumberland and it was not long before Louise was won over to the rural parish life. They added four more children to their existing two and indulged in their favourite pastime of long country walks. In summing up the nine years they spent in the North, she was able to say 'For us both it was a time of getting down to the realities of life, a time in the wilderness, when we could think and face life, when we had leisure for mind and body'.<sup>147</sup>

One of the downsides of preferment and removal from the parish ministry is the fact of no longer being part of an established parochial organisation with a church at the centre of the community. It was something that all clergy families could share, a common set of requirements, a social structure into which one could fit with reasonable swiftness since, as so well described by Catherine Marsh:

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<sup>145</sup> James Covert (2001) *A Victorian Marriage*. p 102

<sup>146</sup> *ibid* p 100

<sup>147</sup> *ibid* p 80

But everywhere there are poor people to be helped, the sick and dying to be visited, mourners to be sympathised with and souls to besought and won for Christ.<sup>148</sup>

Louise Creighton found that her husband's acceptance of a Chair at Cambridge put them into this strange disconnected world:

... when we had not our own church and people to care for.... feeling as if we did not belong anywhere.... Still at Cambridge the fact that we had no church of our own always remained a grief to me. We had no share of any parochial life.<sup>149</sup>

If that was true of their return to the academic life, it proved to be even more so when her husband was then promoted to the Bishopric of Peterborough. She wrote to a friend 'The desolation at the Palace is complete. My present feeling is that I hate the house...' however, she eventually came to enjoy the company and society of the precinct community but there were other changes to her role and the part she could play in her husband's life which were still not to her liking

It is the tiresome separation of the wife from the husband's work which bothers me. He may have ordinations and quiet days in which he cares for the souls of others; all that the wife has to do is to feed their bodies. He goes about giving new energy to the spiritual life of the diocese and the wife stops at home to look after the tidying etc of a stupid big Palace and garden and to pay tiresome calls.<sup>150</sup>

She did, however, adapt to the requirements of being a bishop's wife. It was a far more organisational role than had been the case before – 'an entirely new world.'<sup>151</sup> It involved her in getting to know large numbers of clergy and their families but there were many aspects of his new position which her husband could not share with her. Another development was that, apart from Gemma, their youngest child, she found she could no longer give the time to the education of the rest of the children. They maintained, nevertheless, as a family, a closeness and quantity of shared activities in which they were all able to join, including the boys on their return from boarding school and such cousins and friends who might be visiting. In the larger spaces of the Bishop's Palace it was possible to have dances, something her husband much enjoyed, though she never

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<sup>148</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) Life and friendships of Catherine Marsh p 28

<sup>149</sup> Louise Creighton (1994) Memoirs of a Victorian Woman. p 81

<sup>150</sup> *ibid* p 98

joined in. However, they were adamant that a Bishop and his family should live simply.<sup>152</sup>

Preferment for able men inevitably brings with it changes and six years after his consecration at Peterborough, Mandell Creighton was created Bishop of London with an even greater increase in responsibility and challenge for his wife. It had been over thirty years since the Taits had vacated London House for Lambeth and there were aspects of Catharine Tait's legacy that Louise Creighton attempted to pick up – among them the Ladies Diocesan Association. This group, set up to engage society ladies in worthwhile work during the London season, had lost some of its impetus over time and, although it had been possible to keep it going for a while, it was the formation of the Girls' Diocesan Association which was to outlive its parent. More satisfying were the great events and the entertaining. 'The rush of life was tremendous; the getting to learn so many new things and new people made life feverish and exciting...We entered into the great current of the world's life, ecclesiastical, social, to a certain extent political'<sup>153</sup>

While Louise Creighton's own upbringing had not been within a clergy family, she had had the kind of social youth and early womanhood which had prepared her for middle class society. She had proved a quick learner when it came to the requirements of the parish ministry and, throughout the various moves and changes of status, she had maintained a growing family of seven children and remained the closest friend and colleague of her husband. He had always wanted her not to be limited to a domestic role, and it became possible for her to continue her own writing and the publication of a number of history texts as well as being instrumental in the formation and governance of several women's organisations. She took up, eventually, the suffrage cause (though argued it constantly with her great friend of Oxford days Mrs Humphrey Ward), and was involved in the Girls' Friendly Society, the Mothers' Union and the National Association of Women Workers. She found that from her position, and with the skills of organisation and public speaking she had developed during the course of her husband's ministry, she was able to engage with causes close to her heart which required an influential and

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid* p 100

<sup>152</sup> (something echoed by Henrietta Barnett in comments following a visit to Lambeth – see note in chapter 'A Companionate Marriage', below )

<sup>153</sup> Louise Creighton (1994) *Memoirs of a Victorian Woman*. p 123

eloquent spokesperson. Thus, she entered into the purity debate and, together with her husband, formed the London Council for the Promotion of Morality in addition to much organisational and casework with rescue missions and refuges.<sup>154</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the role of the clergy wife as described throughout this chapter, was subject to an immense variety of interpretations. As well as differences between urban and rural, eminence and simple vocation, high, broad church and evangelical persuasion, there was also the change over time and the professionalisation of the clergyman's role. A change of perception of the role of women followed in the wake of the evangelical revivals and the increased deference given to motherhood and a consequent separation of spheres confined women to the more domestic. This was a movement travelling in the opposite direction to the demands of women themselves. It created questions of identity and loyalty to God, to His Church, to husbands and fathers and to women themselves, questions that have still to be resolved. It is certain that Heeney's conception of a 'golden age of Rectory culture' was, if it existed, a short-lived period, more at home in the Victorian novel than the Victorian consciousness, in image and perception rather than reality.

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<sup>154</sup> *ibid.* p 114`

## **2. Considering the lilies .... some of the constraints to clergy happiness**

There is so much in Biblical literature that exhorts to the uncomplaining, the unquestioning acceptance of one's lot, that to suggest that there were areas which conspired to make the life of clerical wives and daughters (and inevitably the clergy themselves) less than comfortable might seem inappropriate. Such areas did exist, however, and, whether or not those who suffered did so in silence, is only part of the problem.

The remuneration of the clergy throughout a much longer period than this study was unequal in its distribution, dependent on factors quite unconnected with need, desert or merit and was railed upon by clergy and their sympathisers for many generations before any steps were taken to resolve the problem. Inevitably part of the difficulty was the provenance of clergy incomes and the residual mediaeval practices of tithes, great tithes, first fruits and tenths, and entitlements in kind which had been due to parish clergy from their surrounding parishes as well as from the pockets (or more likely agent's pockets) of patrons. Pluralism, brought about by clergy being attached to more than one parish, gave rise to absentee vicars and the engagement of curates to service the less accessible or appealing benefices. The apportioning of the available funds often left curates with much work, no security and little recompense.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners had not been allowed to remain unmindful of the poverty and unfair treatment of some of those who laboured in the Lord's and their name. The very notion of a 'stipend' rather than fees or a salary, was that it was intended to protect clergy from having anxiety about financial matters. Its very smallness, however, did exactly the opposite and, therefore, one must suppose that the understanding was that clergy would have some other income. Some of this income might be his own (or his wife's) inherited wealth, or the income in kind derived from the tithes of the community – a practice unchanged from the Middle Ages and the feudal system. The reforming acts of the 1830s had begun to alter the payment of tithes to the more manageable charges on land belonging to the benefice. It was meant to make the payments more appropriate to the type of role the clergy were being expected to fulfil. It was beginning to draw a line between the farming clergy and their more academic and professional colleagues, while providing them still with a reasonable income and still some glebe to farm or at least to grow produce on if the incumbent had a will to do so.



Queen Anne's Bounty (1704) had had the generous intention of 'the augmentation of the livings of the poorer Anglican clergy' by allowing clergy to buy up more land to add to the value of the benefice but much of the money was tied up in repair and reconstruction of parsonages and its requirements extended to capital and not income. The Parson's Freehold remained and so, with it, the clergyman's responsibilities for the maintenance of his parsonage house and a number of other items:

Procurations, and Syndocals, Tenths, Land and Poor Rates, Land Tax, House and Property Tax, Insurance and Repairs of Glebe house. Buildings, gates etc. Repairs to chancel (*some Rectors were obliged to pay for this*) Drainage charges on Glebe, Charges in income (if any) to the Benefice, Repayment of loans to Queen Anne's Bounty, Stipend of Curate or Curates. Cost of collecting income but not Income Tax.<sup>155</sup>

The Editor of Crockford's Clerical Directory (1860) included this list and other matters that might be of interest to his readers and correspondents, together with a suggestion that there might in addition be a responsibility to provide and pay for a voluntary school which, although not a statutory requirement, might seem morally to be expected. If this seems a heavy charge upon the clerical income, then its effects will have been greater or lesser depending on the amount of income that could be expected from the living in terms of charges and the size of the personal fortune of the incumbent and /or his wife. In 1860 this seemed already to have within it elements of unfairness between parishes. What was to follow in the next two decades was to impinge to a greater and greater extent on the financial viability of some of the clergy and, inevitably, their wives and families. The combined effect of enclosure and the transmutation of tithes to charges on land, together with the decline in the price of grain, causing financial ruin to farmers, meant that glebe land ceased to be financially productive and yielded less and less income to the incumbent who, in turn, depended on much of such income for the support of his family and the meeting of his parochial obligations. That which had been titled a golden age ceased very quickly to be so for the rural clergyman.

The situation that clergy incomes were insufficient and that not all clergy could afford to carry out their calling simply for love of their Lord, had been brought constantly to the attention of the public, as in the writings of Sir Isaac Newton:

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<sup>155</sup> Preface to Crockford's Clerical Directory, (1860) p xii

Where the nation is in a state of prosperity, the wives and children of clergymen will and may expect to bear some proportion to other people, and not to live in so mean a condition as to be the objects of contempt to persons of other professions. Beside a common justice, as well as a natural affection, obliges clergymen to make the best provision they can for their wives and children that they may not be exposed to poverty and contempt when they are dead.<sup>156</sup>

Similarly, at the end of the century, Georgiana Hill in her 1896 history of women in English life, records the bitterness of inferior clergy of an earlier time...

Oh my Lord, how prettily and temperately may a wife and half dozen children be maintain'd with almost £30 per annum! What a handsome shift will an ingenious and frugal divine make to take it by turns and wear a cassock one year and a pair of breeches another. What a primitive sight will it be to see a man of God with his shoes all out at toes, and his stockings out at heel, wandering about in an old russet coat or a tatter'd gown for apprentices to point out and wags to break jests on! And what a notable figure will he make in a pulpit on Sundays that he sent his Hooker and Stillingfleet, his Pearson and Sanderson, his Barrow and Tilltson, with many more fathers of the English Church into limbo long since, to keep his wife's pensive petticoat company and her much lamented wedding ring!<sup>157</sup>

This is the outline of a scenario showing a clergyman and his family sadly embarrassed by their financial limitations, not as a result of high living, but simply in order to maintain the necessities of life. It is a picture at odds with the well fed, port-swigging parson of some descriptions but it draws upon the necessity for clergy to be possessed of a personal income in order to be able to live at an appropriate, though modest level, within their parishes. We have, in previous chapters, touched upon the helpfulness of a wife's income in aiding the running of the clergy household. It might be assumed that more than an average number of clergy marriages were love matches, since few would marry a clergyman for his fortune. Indeed, there are more examples of fathers being most reluctant to give away their daughters to clergy, they being such a poor catch. Sir Isaac Newton again:

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<sup>156</sup> Sir Isaac Newton Tables (1742) quoted in Christopher Hill (1968) Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament. p 199

<sup>157</sup> Georgiana Hill (1896) Women in English Life from the Middle Ages to Modern Times. p 82

Most honest women of silver and gold behaviour are loath to marry with ministers .... because they (clergy) see their wives so hardly bested when they are dead.<sup>158</sup>

This is further borne out by Anthony Bax in The English Parsonage who describes a clergy widow with eight children refusing the accommodation offered by the Bishop of Ely for 'widows of degree' as 'far too disreputable', being in a '...part of Cambridge that no person of either sex would be seen there after dark without exciting suspicion'. Her son was so incensed at the Bishop even considering that a respectable clergy widow with daughters could be so accommodated that he 'declined his Lordship's offer with anything but expressions of gratitude; and ... did not attempt to conceal my surprise and indignation at his proposal.'<sup>159</sup> This indignation is a recurrent theme in much commentary on the past and more recent Church of England:

This failure to provide for clergy widows is all the more shameful when it is remembered how greatly the Church of England leans upon the voluntary services of incumbents' wives and looks to them to be almost unpaid curates and lay workers. The married clergyman retiring may be forgiven for reflecting that, at his end, the Church prefers him to be single and does not encourage his wife to survive him.<sup>160</sup>

This issue of homelessness of clergy widows and families is one which arises at every level of the church from the family of the Archbishop of Canterbury downwards and is one which recurs at various points within this study. The insecurity of tenure of clergy housing was something that has lived on into the twentieth century, and ,while there may now be provision from within the Church that a clergy family should not have the trauma of homelessness added to the tragedy of a father or partner's death ,nevertheless , the situation remains the same, that the house goes with the job and, therefore, at the death of the incumbent, it must be vacated for his or her successor. Spouse and family may have been 'living over the shop' but they may not continue to run the said shop thereafter.

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<sup>158</sup> Sir Isaac Newton (1742) *Tables* quoted in Christopher Hill Social and Economic Status of the Clergy p 201

<sup>159</sup> Henry Gunning (1854) Reminiscences of the University, Town and County of Cambridge from the year 1780.

<sup>160</sup> Guy Mayfield (1958) The Church of England p 55

In The Worthies of England<sup>161</sup> there is mention also of clergy marriages being under strain because of their being undertaken later in life, due to the need to wait for an income or a living, therefore, children being less strong and parents less able to withstand the strain upon them. This would seem an extreme generalisation and, in all my research, little real evidence for it. Nor would it seem that clergy necessarily sought preferment to enhance their income. A visit to the parish church at Little Rissington<sup>162</sup> in Gloucestershire revealed memorials to a clergy family of fifteen children, all reaching adulthood, the boys principally serving in the services and all the nine girls failing to marry, would suggest that their father, who remained fifty three years in the same small parish, must have had both an adequate income with which to feed and clothe them, and no desire to move on or seek greater responsibility.

It is in the differences between country and urban parishes that inequalities of financial support became most apparent. In the countryside, there was much help 'in kind' and an existing deferential structure, which could enable clergy to manage their survival and their credit. Within the newer urban parishes, this was harder, with larger numbers of parishioners to serve, no great amount of glebe or vicarage garden from which to draw fresh produce and a dependence on shopkeepers for provisions and for credit. George Orwell's fictional Clergyman's Daughter describes agonies of embarrassment at the prospect of having to face butchers and grocers whose bills remained unpaid while her father remained in detached denial of such matters. This is fiction but the writings of Noel Streatfeild and Mary Sheepshanks, real clergy daughters in turn of the century urban parishes, suggest that there are elements of truth within it.<sup>163</sup>

Furthermore, there are admonitions in contemporary advice literature which call for prudence in financial matters, and a strong suggestion that it is the wife's duty to protect her clergyman husband from the evils of debt. There is a strange shift in understanding of responsibility here. In the separate sphere of later twentieth century women, there was an assumption that finance was a man's business. Half way through the period of this study, Catharine Tait's brother in law expressed very strongly his feeling that accounts were not a matter for women's minds. That was before he examined the Tait

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<sup>161</sup> Thomas Fuller(1658) (1840)( The Worthies of England pp 79-80

<sup>162</sup> Rosalind Ransford (1990) St Peter's Church, Little Rissington

<sup>163</sup> See Noel Streatfeild and Mary Sheepshanks biographies.

finances, which she had taken over as a young wife and managed alongside School accounts, charity and institutional accounts and their own domestic affairs. His amazement at her financial acumen is gratifying to read. Similarly Zoe Thomson, wife of the vicar of All Souls, Langham Place and later Archbishop of York, found :

She had the makings of an excellent woman of business. She had never been fond of accounts before, but she quickly found out how interesting as well as important they could be.<sup>164</sup>

Minnie Benson<sup>165</sup> on the other hand, when a young wife of Edward Benson, then Master of Wellington and Georgiana Thompson<sup>166</sup>, wife of a Suffolk clergyman, were in a constant state of misery because of their inability to balance books. In Minnie Benson's case, it made her feel the more inferior and humiliated in having to face up to her overpowering husband; in Georgiana Thompson's, case it just made her very sorry and sad that she had brought yet more work upon a man already overstretched and anxious. The main differences here are that while Minnie Benson was just poor at presenting accounts for money they could afford, Georgiana Thompson was spending money on daily living that she and her husband just did not possess.

Georgiana Thomson's problems stemmed from her more elevated upbringing and she had immense difficulties in keeping the vicarage accounts in shades of suitable clerical black. She was constantly in need of subsidy from her father and all the more shamed because this so upset her husband, whose needs were undoubtedly more simple and who would have probably managed quite happily without many of the things she had been brought up to look upon as necessities.

Her husband's biography contains items from both their diaries which record the terrible bind of poverty when in the public eye. It became known in the parish that times were hard for the family and a kindly neighbour offered the vicar's wife a post as her husband's secretary. She was not qualified for the post and knew that she could never accomplish it, in addition to her parish duties and the upbringing of three children. Refusal, however, meant that her husband was bound to take on extra duties and pupils

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<sup>164</sup> E C Rickards (1916) Zoe Thomson of Bishopthorpe p 90

<sup>165</sup> E F Benson (1920) Our Family Affairs

<sup>166</sup> Dorothy Thompson (1969) Sophia's Son, the story of a Suffolk Parson.

into an already overstretched timetable. The charitable gesture was not always the most helpful and the requirement for gratitude an additional cross to bear.

It is not the giving of money that causes pain, nor even, sometimes, the receiving, but, more often, the sense that one's need may suggest some idea of failure and dependence. Beggars, mendicant monks accept their poverty, the estate workers given a meal at harvest and coal at Christmas might seem happy to be in receipt of someone else's bounty, less clearly content are the deserving poor, those queuing for Outdoor Relief, for instance, however, all these might seem in a different category from the clergy family, bound to set a good example of prudence and good management, yet visibly unable to manage on a meagre stipend and, therefore, dependent on hand-outs from patrons, parishioners or established charities. The many advertisements in the front and back pages of Crockford's Clerical Directory give some indication of the proliferation of charities for the support and maintenance of the poorer clergy, their wives, widows and children. The advertisement for the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy in the first edition (1860) speaks of 'the numerous and distressing cases which are continually being brought to the notice of the Governors'.<sup>167</sup> There is also some indication, even at this point, of the need of elderly daughters who have nursed their parents. (see chapter Daughters) No one ever seems to consider what happens if a family has only sons. Does the obligation then fall upon a succession of daughters-in-law?<sup>168</sup>

Perceptions of clergy poverty were, as we have observed, a matter of great chagrin and embarrassment for the clergy and their families. It was bad enough that they should be poor, but that all about them might know of their poverty was an even greater shame and fires of coals might be heaped upon them by the caring but often condescending charity of parishioners. While we detect some of this in biographical writing, it appears also in

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<sup>167</sup> Crockford's Clerical Directory 1860 advertisement.

<sup>168</sup> I may have accidentally chanced upon one answer to this in some research into Gloucestershire villages and their census returns. It is interesting to reconstruct households from the bare bones of the enumerators' entries and in one village I came upon an elderly clergyman with no wife or daughter at home. Instead his household contained a large number of resident pupils, (a common means of augmenting a sparse clergy income). The difference was that his pupils were all girls. Daughters were of sufficient value that in their absence one would feel it necessary to import them.

fiction but when that fiction is the product of clergy wives and daughters, then one has also to acknowledge its probable veracity.<sup>169</sup> The matter is dealt with in only some of the novels referring to clergy life – in Margaret Oliphant's<sup>170</sup> The Curate in Charge,<sup>171</sup> the question of adequate financial support arises and it is the daughters who worry about it while their unworldly father potters on, seemingly unmindful of the practicalities and problems of an insufficient income.

However, there is other writing which does not come in this category but was, nevertheless, popular in the mid-century and that is the small pocket book or pamphlet. These small format books were often given as tracts or published anonymously, presumably to make a particular point or to put over a message. One such is The Curate's Wife (1860)<sup>172</sup> (see also in the chapter 'Living Pages'). Another, written by a well known writer of children's stories and other non-fiction but also a clergy wife, combines much less of a story with even more of a plea for acknowledgement and remedy of the plight of the impoverished clergy. This book, The Poor Incumbent<sup>173</sup>, appeared two years before the other but, in this case, puts very much of the blame on the insouciance of bishops and higher clergy, as well as less-than caring rural landlords. The author of this book, Margaret Gatty, was the wife of the vicar of Ecclesfield, a parish that grew with the surge to the towns and whose vicar had himself written at length about the task of the clergy in such places. (see Introductory Chapter 'The View in the Mirror') She paints a very black picture of the hardships of a 'poor incumbent' in her book and of his struggles to maintain a large family. She tells of him taking back some of his glebe in a vain attempt to farm it himself rather than pay for milk and vegetables, of his failure as a smallholder and of his frustration at being unable to assist parishioners either in their inadequate housing or with any donations or help. The family are rescued from misery by a newly appointed bishop who recognises their distress and its causes and assists them not only financially but with the kind of support that dispels their sense of isolation and exploitation. The twist in this tale is that, while the clergyman and his family are

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<sup>169</sup> See writings of Anne Bronte, Margaret Gatty, Juliana Ewing, Noel Streatfeild

<sup>170</sup> Margaret Oliphant was not a clergy wife but a wife and later widow who wrote prolifically in order to support her own and her more extended family. Her writing is however, principally set within a clerical context.

<sup>171</sup> Margaret Oliphant (1875) The Curate in Charge (1987 edition)

<sup>172</sup> Anon (1860) The Curate's Wife

<sup>173</sup> Margaret Gatty (1858) The Poor Incumbent

restored, it is the bishop who dies worn out, derided and with precious little recognition of his struggle for fairness and self respect for God's poorly paid servants<sup>174</sup>.

It is to be wondered how Margaret Gatty's writing of this particular book was viewed by the Reverend Alfred Gatty, himself a prolific writer on a variety of matters from his admonitory tome The Vicar and his Duties (1858)<sup>175</sup> to his history of his own church and parish Life in One Living<sup>176</sup>. What renders the subject of Margaret Gatty's little book the more poignant and significant is her own situation. As already mentioned (see chapter 'Rectory Culture'), her husband's stipend was insufficient for him to be able to support a wife and a family of ten children, let alone to allow him to mix socially with the gentry in his parish. While The Poor Incumbent might not have made her fortune, her prolific flow of novels, children's books and serial chapters for magazines was sufficient to allow her to support the family, send all her sons to public school and still provide money to the parish purse to provide blankets and comforts for the poor. The need to support her husband and large family did not come without considerable personal cost:

Twenty years earlier Margaret had no one to help and much of her early married life seemed to be taken up by this struggle to make ends meet. It was a strain which was never relaxed and... did more than anything to bring about the lingering illness from which she suffered for the last ten years of her life.<sup>177</sup>

Another fiction writer concerned with clergy poverty in this more direct style is the Rev F E Paget in his Owlet of Owlestone Edge<sup>178</sup>, whose range of clergy wives include those whose lives are forever shadowed by financial anxieties and lack of security. While it would seem to be sufficient of an issue to engage writers on many fronts it is much less often present in autobiography and journal writing, even if it may have been the case, because of the concern not to complain, to appear ungrateful or to cast any sort of sleight on loved ones serving God under less than the best circumstances. One senses that it would appear disloyal both to the church and to the father or husband to dwell upon such a worldly issue.

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<sup>174</sup> The task of ensuring the book reached at least one of its targets was undertaken 'by Miss Burdett Coutts, the philanthropist and friend of Mr Dickens, who had it sumptuously bound at a cost of 2 to 3 guineas and presented it to the Bishop of Oxford.' (Christobel Maxwell (1949) Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing. p 110)

<sup>175</sup> Rev. Alfred Gatty (1858) The Vicar and his Duties

<sup>176</sup> Alfred Gatty (1884) Life at One Living

<sup>177</sup> *ibid* p 80

<sup>178</sup> Rev F E Paget (1856) Owlet of Owlestone Edge



One clergyman who was prepared to plead the cause of the 'begging parson' was Edward Spooner (brother of Catharine Tait). In his book Parson and People he puts the case of the urban parish where the income of the incumbent is determined to some extent by pew rents. He cites the case of a particular parson who, in attempting to maintain as many free seats as possible, seriously limited his own income. He makes a strong case that there are many such who do labour long and hard and contribute considerably to the parish expenses out of their own resources. He does also, just, refer to the clergyman's wife, at least, he writes of 'other claims than hers who was willing, like himself to spend and be spent for Christ' and, when the writer was seeking from him an answer to his offer of a far more lucrative living, gives him time to consult with' her who was at once most deeply interested in his decision, and best able to advise him in it.<sup>179</sup>

If income, or lack of it, remained a problem both before the period of this study and after it, then another allied to it must have been accommodation. One passes splendid, ivy covered or even palatial residences today with signs saying 'The Old Rectory' in beautifully maintained country villages and one has not often to go far before discovering some 1970s modest detached house with garage bearing 'The Rectory' on its gatepost. The period of grand parsonage building in the later part of the nineteenth century may have been appropriate in some ways to the large families of the time but its legacy was one of huge fuel bills, empty rooms and very cold comfort. The curiosities of Queen Anne's Bounty did allow clergy to borrow money on the security of benefice land in order to build or improve parsonage houses and the notion to allow repayment over a number of years and incumbents may have appeared fair initially, but with changes in circumstances as in the leaner years of the 1870s and 80s, this inherited burden became an impossibility for some. Thus, the double bind of a large and commodious but uneconomic house with a crippling commitment to repay a previous incumbent's borrowed outlay, combined two of the dominant constraints to clergy happiness and comfortable family living. By 1893, the administrators of Queen Anne's Bounty were driven to accept that the charity's well-meaning intentions were, in fact, the cause of immense hardship and to renegotiate the terms of such repayments.

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<sup>179</sup> Edward Spooner (1864) Parson and People. p 137

This is to generalise. Clergy housing came in immense variety as did its inhabitants. Country clergy in modest rural housing might feel at one with their parishioners. Hunting parsons, aspiring to an affiliation with the gentry and with some personal income might feel a more imposing vicarage with stabling appropriate to their situation. In W R Ward's Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 he speaks of 'their (the educated clergy) new affluence' separating them 'from the people in the most literal sense;

they abandoned the old mud and wattle parsonage in the village and moved out, sometimes out of the parish, and began the building of these rural palaces which have been a millstone round the neck of their successors ever since.<sup>180</sup>

The new urban parishes had little endowment and depended on grants from the Commissioners and from charities. When Henrietta and Samuel Barnett went to Whitechapel in 1873 to decide whether to accept the living, they found themselves in the midst of some of the worst of the London slums, a church and attached rooms in a state of disrepair and neglect and a vicarage into which they could not move because the previous incumbent was ill and still in residence. In addition, they inherited an expectation of clergy bounty or at least charity of which the Barnetts strongly disapproved and which it took much effort to dislodge.

House building and design was very much in the hands of the clergy. Mary Richardson's mother regretted sincerely the 'pretty vicarage' of St Mary's, Newington, near Sittingbourne in Kent and so hated their newly built and husband-designed parsonage that she had to close her eyes when approaching it for she 'never could bear to look at it'.<sup>181</sup> A Cornish clergyman, R S Hawker, 'built his own parsonage, in pleasant Victorian Gothic, with the chimneys fashioned like the towers of the churches he had served'.<sup>182</sup> Yet, however grand, or inconvenient or idiosyncratic the parsonage house, it was home to the parson's family, his servants and his pupils and as such a focus for church domestic activity, somehow never totally a private house, just as its inhabitants were never quite a private family. Whether through the meeting of their parish obligations, the need to take in pupils or the understanding that no one might be turned away from their door, there was always a lack of privacy and separation which, though an

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<sup>180</sup> W R Ward (1972) Religion and Society in England 1790-1850. p 9

<sup>181</sup> Mary Richardson Eyre (1904) Poor Mary. p 16

<sup>182</sup> Alan Savidge (1964) The Parsonage in England. p 120

acknowledged part of the job, could, nevertheless, intrude on family harmony or relaxation. Janet Spedding<sup>183</sup> in her thesis on clergy wives, had identified through her research, albeit in the case of mid- twentieth century wives, a sense of intrusion felt by these wives, not only for the lack of privacy, but for the feeling of being 'on view' when any failure to present an entirely clean and tidy house would bring disrepute upon herself and her husband.

To give some respite from the situation of the home being a semi-public place, some more fortunate clergy might winter in warmer climes, spend the summer in Europe or repair to spas for their health. Others, like the Barnetts in Whitechapel, found it necessary to establish a retreat outside the parish, in their case in leafy Hampstead, in order to recuperate from the stresses of their impoverished surroundings. This was not, however, total exclusion and escapism, for in turn the Barnetts' extended the hospitality of the Hampstead home to countless church workers and distressed people from Whitechapel, recognising the benefit of the cleaner air and more healthy surroundings.

That the Barnetts could achieve this pays tribute to their nature and their manner of living. It is to be wondered how the people of some parishes could ever have seen their clergy as anything but distant, given the kind of properties erected and tenanted by some clergy. Indeed, Charles Kingsley makes the point in his Lectures to Ladies on Practical Subjects that there was a 'creation of social distance in urban areas and clergy .... became socially absorbed into the gentry, and established their residences further and further away from their hungry sheep.'<sup>184</sup> In Catherine Marsh's biography, the parsonage houses she inhabited are recorded in illustrations in all their glory (see figure 1), huge gothic piles with, undoubtedly, large numbers of bedrooms to accommodate the family plus the inevitable extra resident relatives and friends. Grand they may have been, but cold some undoubtedly were. Her father, in his later years, while Vicar of Beddington, was recommended to winter at his grandson's rectory at Beckenham because it was a warmer house.

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<sup>183</sup> Janet Finch (1983) Married to the Job: Wives' Incorporation in Men's Work

<sup>184</sup> Rev Charles Kingsley (1855) in Lectures to Ladies on Practical Subjects. p 36

**Figure 1. Parsonages: the rectories at Beckenham, Feltwell, Beddington and the vicarage at Sheriff Hales – homes of Catherine Marsh**

Such extended families and clergy households meant that the vicarage or rectory contingent (be they family, visitors or servants) could constitute a significant number of people within a small village. The Le Marchant family of Little Rissington, (fifteen children, nine unmarried daughters living at home,) must have stretched the capabilities of their vicarage and ultimately encouraged them to build on extensions which may have added capacity, if not aesthetic beauty, to the property. This particular family were so firmly part of the village that when the Rev. Robert Le Marchant died, aged 95, in the fifty-fourth year of his incumbency there, it was necessary to purchase a new vicarage for his successor, in order not to move the remaining Le Marchant family from their home.<sup>185</sup> Such consideration for an existing and long-standing family did exist although there was no statutory provision for it. Catherine Marsh died nearly a year after the clergyman husband of her niece, in whose rectory she was living, but the incoming rector was prepared to take rooms elsewhere, since she was too ill to move. Both of these circumstances indicate a consideration built up within a parish for a much loved clergy family and a willingness to find ways round the clear-cut but inevitable consequences of the death of a clergyman.

It might be said that in identifying these particular constraints on clergy happiness and, more especially, the role of clergy wives and daughters in dealing with them, that I have completely ignored any of the spiritual problems that may also have constrained clergy marriage. I do not ignore them for undoubtedly problems of faith, differences of interpretation or allegiance and questions of loyalty did and do arise and put strains upon household, parish and marriage. However, I maintain that the problems associated with clergy income and the attendant problems of housing and provision for later life were major considerations. The other problems I have dealt with in other chapters in the study, both in the generality of the introduction, the other more specific chapters and the group biographies. They are part of the fabric of Christian living and have their place there.

I return to the matter of poverty because it so much underpins writing about the clergy. As I have already indicated, it much less frequently appears in the writing of clergy or their wives themselves, for the reasons I have suggested, that it was something they

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<sup>185</sup> Rosalind Ransford (1990) St Peter's Church, Little Rissington.

'managed' by whatever means, that it was something that women dealt with, or that to raise it publicly would imply either failure or disloyalty. How then, one might ask, can I presume it to have so much importance? For this I have to turn to the writers and commentators on the church and the clergy for the whole length of time since the Reformation. It is from their perception and analysis that it becomes clear that the Church of England had no clear or equitable policy for the maintenance of its clergy or their families. It had expectations, as exemplified in the services of ordination, but no standard form of provision. Indeed, in making enquiries today of bishops about any centrality of expectation, the response was that such things had always been the care and responsibility of the individual diocese, (there are currently forty-three), hence the sharp observations of the Episcopal layer in fictional and semi-fictional writing.

Where a curious dichotomy arises, I believe, is in the relative valuing of the clergy and the Word of God. This study is set firmly within the English protestant tradition and, consequently, has little concern with the vows of poverty of the monastic orders or the generous giving towards rich decoration of the church, as might seem to be the case in the Roman Catholic church. It is the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments that we understand as priestly duty and yet, every handbook and volume of advice literature accentuates the pastoral element and the notion of the priest among his people. Edward Mann, in his review of the depressing figures revealed in the 1851 Religious Census, comments, as one of his reasons for the decline in church attendance and general disinterest in religion, that there is a suspicion abroad of a paid clergy in that they might only be doing their official duty for the money. This caused a hollow laugh from some clergy but perception is not necessarily related to truth or actuality. Mann continues to suggest that the church might do better 'if those who introduced the message of Christianity were less removed in station and pursuits from those whom it is sought to influence.'<sup>186</sup>

In considering the matter of clergy income, there are other factors which emerge and which determine both the truth and the perceptions of truth. One of these was, as Mann as intimated, the perceived status of the clergy and his family. Another is that of the influence of social, demographic and economic trends and movements on the station

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<sup>186</sup> Horace Mann (1854) *Sketches of the Religious Denominations of the Present Day*.

and finances of the clergy. All of these influences and perceptions were the subject of change over time. Change did not always indicate progress or improvement and, as clergy became more detached from the patronage of the gentry, their income did not grow apace with their independence. Nor, as we have observed, did the movement from the country to the towns and cities bring with it the prosperity for the clergy that their lay parishioners had made that same move to achieve. However, one must not be tempted into negativity in looking at clergy finances. One guarantee of the poor clergy income was that certainly no one would go into the church just for the money. One is speaking here of a vocation and the rewards of a vocation can be beyond price. Also, the relationships built up within communities testified to their strength in cases where support and immense consideration were given to clergy, to their widows and children in times of death and distress.

Could it be that in many instances the poverty was accepted and worked with and the love, respect and support of parishioners received and enjoyed with gratitude and thankfulness? This would, I believe, be to put a too simple and comfortable gloss upon the situation but I, nevertheless, would contend that there were satisfactions and rewards that clergy families did, and do, enjoy that were what enabled them to continue to do the job in often the most unpromising of circumstances. Where I think it most impinges on the clergy wife and family is, however, in the fact that it was so often the wife who had to tend to the financial management of the household, that in some clergy there was a sense of unworldliness which on occasion removed them from the forefront of having to deal with the problem and the inevitable answer to the argument for vocation, that it was not necessarily the vocation of the wife and family.

### 3. Not always made in heaven: some less happy aspects of clergy marriage

'I vexed my dear one by what I said. I am not fit to be a clergyman's wife'<sup>187</sup>

A quest for befittedness must be a serious inhibition to the happy course of clergy marriage. That of the wife, seeing herself so much put in the role of exemplar:

But the qualifications for becoming a Preacher's wife – the going in, and going out before the people, and setting an example worthy their imitation, with a sight and sense of my wants for such a station affected me much.<sup>188</sup>

as much as the husband or indeed the other players in the clergy marriage – the parish/bishop/squire/authors of clergy advice handbooks. It was, indeed, a hard role to fill and a woman with any sense of inadequacy which was not dispelled by her husband could find it so onerous or depressing that it might totally destroy all possibilities of marital happiness. Inevitably, some humility is a virtue and for those who could harness that humility and, nevertheless, meet their husband's needs, there was the prospect of some joy. Archibald Tait, writing to his fiancée Catharine, saw in her an example for his own following as he confided to his journal on their wedding day:

'O Lord, may I learn from her to give my life to Thee ... – may we be imbued in Thy faith and fear - she is one to live to Thee. Save me O Lord from my hard, evil heart and make me, with her, Thy servant for ever.'<sup>189</sup>

The secret of their immensely happy marriage was that fact that he did not set himself up as her superior in any sense at all, that he deferred to her in matters of personal faith and that he was himself possessed of humility. A history of wives as chattels and of clergy wives as chattels not only of the man but of his patrons, his parish and his church did not predispose all men in holy orders to this virtue.

To upper and middle-class spinsters, marriage to a clergyman was not necessarily a 'good match'. Holy orders were taken frequently by younger sons of the landed gentry,

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<sup>187</sup> Dorothy Thompson, (1969) *Sophia's Son. The story of a Suffolk parson*, p 93

<sup>188</sup> Mary Holder (wife of Rev George Holder) in Zachariah Taft (1882) *Holy Women – Biographical Sketches* –Vol 1

<sup>189</sup> Tait Papers at Lambeth Palace 28.7.2843



those with no great financial or territorial expectations and for whom a fellowship in an Oxford college would provide as much support as would be necessary until such time as a living might be proposed and then its nature, and more importantly its stipend, might vary between the adequate and the microscopic. The clergy were not, by nature of their calling, men of great financial means. If they had a private income, if they could draw upon substantial tithes, if their patrons were generous, then they might live reasonably comfortably. Otherwise, they might need to look to their own skills in farming or teaching or more substantially, to the prospect of a wife with a respectable income of her own. Katherine Lynd, in an article entitled The Family and the History of Public Life comments that 'It is clear that ideologies of the middle class family's financial independence, for example, concealed the extraordinary importance of inherited wealth to bourgeois households.'<sup>190</sup>

This situation, of a woman marrying, for love, a clergyman of slender means, if the love bond were sufficient, might withstand the straightened circumstances and the reduced standard of living, but it would be bound to impose some difficulties in adjustment and parental approval. If the wife came to the marriage from elevated circumstances, then she might also have some difficulty in managing a small household on a limited budget. Annie Besant, though hardly from a wealthy family, found herself similarly unprepared: '... knowing nothing of household management or economical use of money - I had never had an allowance or even bought myself a pair of gloves.'<sup>191</sup> Similarly, some of the skills expected of a clergy wife throughout much of the nineteenth century, the ability to dispense medicines, to manage the finances of thrift clubs, to supervise plain sewing and to cater economically for visitors, church occasions and a family might not have been learned at her mother's knee. This is where wives who were themselves clergy daughters would almost always have the advantage. This lifestyle and these skills would have been theirs since childhood and the ability to manage within limited means would have been internalised from an early age.

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<sup>190</sup> Katherine A. Lynd, 'The family and the History of Public Life' in Journal of Interdisciplinary History Vol. XXIV (Spring 1994) p 671

<sup>191</sup> Annie Besant (1893) An Autobiography p 81

Whereas the need to manage financial constraint might have imposed pressures on any woman, it was only one aspect of the demands made on this particular sort of marriage. Many women, over centuries have found themselves 'married' to their husband's job or profession. Any shopkeeper's wife, living over the shop, any doctor's wife answering the door or the telephone to patients, any fisherman's wife waiting at the quayside, any soldier's wife anticipating the next posting and the need to pack up her home and transport it, would say that their marriage involved more than just keeping house for a man and bringing up his children. It is a situation that, until really recently, has always been dependent upon the man's position. Bringing work home to complete, being 'on call', living in a tied house or on work premises, are all aspects of the intrusion of the man's working life into his home. However, for the clergy wife there is more; there is an understanding that not only will she share her life and her love with her husband but it would be most convenient if she could share her faith as well. This would then enable her to be accepting to his ideas, able to share his deepest concerns and understanding about the kind of demands faith can make. In a book of sermons published in 1910, the nature of the demands is set out such that one could sympathise with any woman feeling unequal to the task:

... Think how the wife of a clergyman may keep up her husband's activity and usefulness in a parish, by lending him something of her cheerfulness and enthusiasm. By showing him the charm and romance which underlie even monotonous and commonplace duties, she will encourage him in the performance of regular and sustained efforts for the good of others, however, dreary or hopeless they may appear. Her clearer insight, too and tenderer sympathies for the suffering or the tempted, will often enable him to effect what, without her, he would strive in vain to accomplish.<sup>192</sup>

Another dangerous aspect was the view of some young women that being married to a clergyman was the highest kind of spiritual service one could aspire to. Annie Wood, (later Annie Besant), found herself caught up in emotional and sexual fantasies about nature of religious fulfilment. In her Autobiographical Sketches, she views this quite clearly as being a very natural stage to go through in her formative years but it took her further, for she confided that

swayed by these feelings, the position of a clergyman's wife seems second only to that of the nun, and has therefore, a wonderful attractiveness, an attractiveness in which the particular clergyman affected plays a very subordinate part<sup>193</sup>

Similarly Mary Anne Crockat, who married into the Moberley family, deeply embedded in the Church and the University in Oxford, harboured ideas of the status of clergy marriage. Living in Naples, she was advised by an Englishwoman that 'nice girls in England did not waltz', and, painful though it was, she never waltzed again. In his family biography Dulce Domum, C.E. Moberley goes on to explain that:

The reason for this wonderful piece of self-denial was that Mary Crockat's dream was to marry an English clergyman, believing that parish work in a country living, with its monotony and poverty, represented the highest life of sacrifice possible to an educated gentleman.<sup>194</sup>

Regrettably, while Mary Crockat's aspirations were fulfilled and she married happily into the Moberly clerical dynasty, those of Annie Wood were not. It was commented cruelly by her friend T.E. Stead that, 'Annie Besant wanted to be a Bride of Christ but had to settle for Frank Besant'. In becoming engaged to the Rev. Frank Besant, she acknowledged, later, that 'with a sigh of regret my dreams of the "religious life" were given up' and, in their place, she put 'the work which would have to be done as the wife of a priest, labouring ever in the church and among the poor.' To her a priest was 'a half-angelic creature, whose whole life was consecrated to Heaven'. To counter her reluctance she was assured 'You will have more opportunity of doing good as a clergyman's wife than as anything else'.<sup>195</sup> It might seem clear reading this, as it inevitably became clear to Annie Besant, that these were unreasonable expectations both of herself and her prospective husband. She was forgetting that marriage itself was something that needed to be considered aside from any vocation. It was an unsteady foothold on a rocky path. Others did approach it similarly; Henrietta Rowland, when proposed to by the Rev. Samuel Barnett, had not looked on him in any romantic light at

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<sup>192</sup> Rev. Vivian R Lennard (Rector of Lower Heyford) (1910) Woman, her power, influence and mission. p 34

<sup>193</sup> Annie Besant (1885) Autobiographical Sketches p 36-7

<sup>194</sup> C.E. Moberley (1911) Dulce Domum p 42

<sup>195</sup> Annie Besant (1885) Autobiographical Sketches p 39

all, but her decision was, in the end, guided by the fact that if she refused him, one or other of them would have to give up the social and philanthropic work they were involved in with Octavia Hill. However, having made this choice, for what seem like self-sacrificing and pragmatic reasons, their marriage survived to become one of immense affection and shared involvement, and together and separately, their names are renowned for acts of great philanthropy and reform. Annie Besant is also famous as a social reformer and, in her lifetime achieved great things for the poor and the oppressed but this was entirely divorced from her marriage, as she ultimately was from the Rev. Frank Besant.

While Annie Besant's expectations of life as a clergy wife were impractical and unrealistic, it was not the limited associations she had with like minded people in her parish, nor her naiveté at the demands of marriage, nor her realisation that even if she were able to fulfil herself as an author, nothing she earned would actually be hers, nor even her antipathy to her husband and her clinging to her mother and her two delicate children which caused the Besant marriage to end. In the end, after all these difficulties had arisen and been dealt with, it was her own personal loss of faith which was the turning point. In a clergy marriage a non-communicant wife was a problem. It could hardly pass unnoticed in a small or village community. She answered honestly to direct questions, stating that she felt unable to make the profession of faith required, but as 'the idea of heresy in a vicar's wife did not readily suggest itself to the ordinary bucolic mind'... few questions were asked. However, manage as she might this aspect of wifely duty i.e. to remain at home, to attend services if not actually to participate and to otherwise contribute to the maintenance of apparent harmony, it was not to be. An article she had written under the title 'My Path to Atheism'<sup>196</sup> was published, though without her name. However, a copy of the paper in which it appeared was sent to one of her husband's relations, bearing as it did the inscription 'By the wife of a beneficed clergyman'. This public declaration was considered too dangerous, lest she should be identified. Consequently, a choice had to be made. Following rows and even physical abuse from her husband, Annie Besant left home for a period but her return required that she resume as a communicant. She should either do this or be required to leave home permanently. She decided to leave. It was a dreadfully painful decision – her financial

prospects would mean immense hardship and there was also the matter of the custody of the children. There was a high price to pay for freedom from an unhappy marriage and the need to live a lie. Eventually, her brother intervened and a legal separation was agreed in which she would give up her son but be able to keep her daughter and to be allowed a small income. She was only twenty-six.

If part of the reason for the failure of the Besant marriage was unreasonable expectations, principally, but not wholly on the part of the wife, then misery in the Benson marriage would have to be attributed to equally unreasonable expectations on the part of the husband. Anyone looking at how the marriage of Minnie Sidgwick and Edward Benson had come about would have had some anxiety. In a society where child brides and arranged marriages were not part of the culture, this partnership of a mature man with a young and inexperienced woman would have sounded warning bells to many. In her son's biography, which chronicles the relationships of his family and, particularly his parents, the conclusion is that between Minnie and Edward Benson there was 'real and natural incompatibility'.<sup>197</sup> All those who have written about this stormy and troubled marriage have come to this conclusion and yet, unlike the Besant marriage, Edward Benson's love for his wife and family, though passionate and stifling at times, never permitted her any contemplation of separation. She, like Annie Besant, experienced a crisis of faith, but, although she was not able to discuss it with her husband, for fear of how it would hurt him, she managed to resolve it and to emerge stronger in her faith, and, to some extent, liberated from the constrictions she had felt his views put upon her.

There are many similarities between these two marriages and the ties that did bind them were the ties of duty. Annie Besant did not claim all the right in her situation, simply that she had been mishandled – 'I must have been a very unsatisfactory wife from the beginning, though I think other treatment might gradually have turned me into a fair imitation of the proper conventional article'.<sup>198</sup> There is a sense that, even with all its difficulties, her desire to do right might have conquered her antipathy to a man whose view of marriage and the man/woman relationship turned out to be so very different from

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<sup>196</sup> By the wife of a beneficed clergyman (Annie Besant) (1877) My Path to Atheism

<sup>197</sup> F E Benson (1920) Our Family Affairs

<sup>198</sup> Annie Besant (1893) An autobiography p 81

her own. 'We were an ill-matched pair,.... from the very outset: he with very high ideas of a husband's authority and a wife's submission, holding strongly to the "master in my own house theory"'. Edward Benson held very similar views, a notion of unquestioned rightness and authority but added to this was a sense of father/child domination – he the teacher and she always, throughout the first fifteen years of their marriage, the frightened child, always anxious to do right in his eyes, to come up to scratch, to please him by fulfilling the tasks he set her.

The Archbishop had the Mid-Victorian virtues: intellectual and physical energy, devotion to duty, unswerving rectitude and sincere religious feeling. The qualities he lacked included imagination and the power of putting himself into another's place. He was unceasingly strenuous, vital, dogmatic and domineering and from early on he had earned himself the triple authority of paterfamilias, schoolmaster and priest.<sup>199</sup>

Her expectations, at the outset of her marriage, had already been established because, from the age of twelve, she had been marked out for union with this man so much her senior. He had seen in her someone he could fashion and mould into a perfection that was totally unrealistic. He was passionate in his nature, quick in his temper and totally determined in his manner of conducting his life and his household. Minnie herself was intelligent but innocent, unprepared (as were so many women of her age) for the realities of living in intimacy with a man while still being his subordinate in all things. In the 'between the lines' manner in which we are bound to observe the intimate life of these marriages, the contrasts are enormous. From the devoted and passionate love affair of the Taits, to the loving but not necessarily physical companionate relationship of the Barnetts – both of whose marriages would be regarded as very happy, it is sad to look on the Bensons and the Besants, bound it would seem to suffer and be still, to produce children and yet dread the conjugal relationship. This is the more poignant because these women went on to have loving and fulfilling relationships afterwards with other people. It is also possible that marital incompatibility or dysfunction can be the result of earlier experiences. In her book Two Victorian Families<sup>200</sup>, Betty Askwith suggests that Edward Benson's earlier sexual experience might have been damaging. Similarly,

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<sup>199</sup> Betty Askwith (1971) Two Victorian Families p 109

<sup>200</sup> *ibid*

Minnie Benson, although young and naïve at her marriage, was not without passion of some sort throughout her life, and while her relationship with Lucy Tait has been well chronicled<sup>201</sup> and is supported by primary sources, it is also clear from Askwith's book that she was frequently in love with other women in what would at the time have been regarded as fairly common intense friendships.

While the problems of these two marriages have been written about at length, they do present an exception to the rule. The reasons for their reaching the public domain are, inevitably, because of the sensational nature of their own personalities, the prominence of Benson as, ultimately, Archbishop of Canterbury and the fame achieved by their children in the unconventional surroundings of the literary world. Besant's fame arose from her subsequent life as a political activist and philanthropist. In her autobiography, she doubtless felt it necessary, given her public friendship with Charles Bradlaugh and her adoption of the tenets of Theosophy, that she should explain her background and provenance. Had these women not penetrated the public arena, it is likely that their marital difficulties would have remained unknown to all but their closest families.

Inevitably, it cannot be that all clergy marriages are happy. Through much of the nineteenth century the prospect of divorce was almost an impossibility. But, more than that, was the problem of demonstrating disharmony and the failure of a couple, who had made their union in the presence of God, yet found themselves unable to continue. Throughout all my research, instances of clergy divorce in this period are very hard to find. Instances of unhappiness emerge between lines, now and then, but they are rare. The only fair conclusion to draw is that, when couples found themselves incompatible, they either continued to live behind the façade of a continuing marriage or a separation was shrouded in a change of parish, though this would be harder to disguise if the priest were not to be encouraged to remarry. For all their invisibility, after all, wives were a useful and helpful adjunct to the clergy.

It is, therefore, likely that much unhappiness may have been hidden behind parsonage doors. For all the reasons quoted before but especially for the lack of privacy, this must

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<sup>201</sup> Michael Roper and John Tosh (1991), Manful Assertions, Geoffrey Palmer and Noel Lloyd (1998) Father of the Bensons (et al), Michael Roper and John Tosh (1999) A Man's Place pp 68-73

have put a strain upon families that was hard to bear. On the other hand, there was always the inescapable requirement of duty. Clergymen fulfilled their priestly demands and retired to the sanctuary of the study or the library. Mandell Creighton, happily married though he was to a very capable and devoted woman, 'was very anxious that his marriage should in no way interfere with the closeness of his relations with his college.'<sup>202</sup> Having God or the Church as the third party in a marriage was one thing, but Heaven forefend that anyone should intrude between a man and his college!

For the clergy wife, there was the sublimation of unhappiness to duty; there was always so much to do, so many requirements, so many opportunities 'never to be weary of doing good'. The opportunities for friends to confide in may not have been so great, depending on the social network in which she existed, for some women there being no one with whom, socially, they felt they could associate, for others, a sense of distance because of a view of them being 'set apart' or even a suggestion that it would be inappropriate to have local friends<sup>203</sup>. (hence the usefulness of the diary – though with this, the caveat that, even here, to admit distress or ill-treatment might seem disloyal).

While talking about a failed or failing marriage, or acknowledging serious family crises such as debt or inappropriate behaviour by a partner to the marriage, might have been extremely difficult, there are also suggestions, listening to accounts of modern clergy wives, that such things would have had to be, at all costs, kept secret. Falling into debt could be seen as the failure of the man (or more particularly his wife) despite the meagre stipend and the effects of general economic depression. Inappropriate behaviour on the part of a priest would have to be dealt with by his bishop and there are suggestions of clergy closing ranks, or bishops failing to acknowledge impropriety in the ordained ministry. Modern clergy wives have an organisation 'Broken Rites' which provides counselling and support for clergy in situations of marital failure and distress. Yet even today there are some who feel that lack of support is often due to the immensely high expectations of church and parish and the failure to acknowledge clerical feet of clay.

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<sup>202</sup> Louise Creighton (1904) Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton Vol 1. p 129

<sup>203</sup> Janet Finch (1983) Married to the Job. p 39



Inevitably sometimes applications for divorce did come to court, as in the case of Frances Kelly, wife of the Rev James Kelly, of St George's, Liverpool, her claim being that she was:

not allowed to lead a proper life, visit the sick or take the sacrament. (She was) kept a prisoner in her own house. Own inheritance lost by husband. Judicial separation granted (eventually/ with costs) 1869-72<sup>204</sup>.

A significant factor in the absence of clergy divorce was that the legal status of divorce only moved from the ecclesiastical to the civil courts with the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act in 1857<sup>205</sup>. It was regarded by many as a retrograde step and a threat to the sanctity of the family. In acknowledging marital disharmony, it threatened the concept of domestic happiness as the heart and security of the middle class ideal. Poovey, in Uneven Developments, argues that 'the ideology of separate spheres .... both generated and depended on an arrangement of social and property relations that positioned women as moral superiors and economic dependents'<sup>206</sup>. Its troubled passage through Parliament was not only due to changes of government and conflict but to the enormity of the requirement to acknowledge any sort of double standard existing or any sort of equality of standing suggested by making the laws governing divorce for both men and women consistent. If this was part of its problem in the world of Parliament and legislature, it met another wave of opposition within the ecclesiastical and parochial domains and it was opposed by many clergy, as by many of their parishioners, because it was regarded as un-Christian. There was not, however, universal agreement among clergy, any more than among the population and while the debate railed on throughout the century, the difficulty of any woman's position following divorce remained an inhibiting factor.

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<sup>204</sup> Law Reports – courts of Probate and Divorce 33-35 Vict 1869-72 II 31-38.

<sup>205</sup> It was introduced to the House of Lords in 1854 as the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Bill but due to war, change of government and bad planning it did not receive the royal assent until August 1857 and became law on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1858.

<sup>206</sup> Mary Poovey, (1988) Uneven Developments. The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England. p 60

One of the other factors was that of class and the (perceived)<sup>207</sup> immense cost of a legal settlement. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce supported the Bill in Parliament at an early stage but voted against it when it finally returned to the Lords. His support had been that he saw the inequity of a law which meant that only the wealthy would have recourse to it. However, if one further unpacks the reasons for his support, they centre around the fact that

it is perfectly well known that a legal divorce (is) an impossibility and to that circumstance might be traced the sacredness of the marriage tie among the lower orders of the English people which (is) so remarkable.<sup>208</sup>

Nevertheless, the combined pressures of possible high expense and general disapproval, the need to apportion blame and the sanction that forbade remarriage, would all conspire to make divorce for the generality of the clergy virtually an impossibility. Horstmann in Victorian Divorce,<sup>209</sup> chronicles the few clergy divorces of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. He then attributes an increase following the increase of travel, which yielded six clergy divorces between 1835 and 1850. This was still not a huge number and the reality was that divorces were invariably brought by men against adulterous wives.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, whatever the difficulties inherent in a clergy marriage, however, great the strains of limited finance (not to say poverty), unreasonable expectations of husbands, bishops, parishioners, society, the need to maintain an exemplary position, the lack of private space in a tied house, the restrictions on friendship and association and the immense hard work for both husband and wife, most marriages remained, on the surface at least, intact. Inevitably, the fear of public censure and immense legal constraints would always have been an inhibiting factor, but that is to

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<sup>207</sup> Sybil Wolfram, in Divorce in England 1700-1857 has research which suggests that 'divorce was not nearly as costly as almost all official commentators claimed'. Quoted in Mary Poovey (1989) Uneven Developments p 221.

<sup>208</sup> Samuel Wilberforce in Hansard's Parliamentary Debates 6/26/56 p 59

<sup>209</sup> Allen Horstmann (1985) Victorian Divorce p 58-9

take a negative view. Women married clergymen, principally because they wanted to, because they were well matched, they wanted or did not want children, because they shared a common cause and faith. At their marriage, they made vows before God that they did not wish to break and many found themselves happy to be 'true yoke-fellows to their husbands in the fruitful discharge of the high office of Christian ministry.'<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Anon. (1832) Hints to a Clergyman's Wife. p v

#### **4 Very great expectations: exemplary literature in the lives of clergy families.**

Throughout the nineteenth century, it would be wrong to think that all preaching was done from the pulpit. The young and the newly adult, the newly confirmed, the newly ordained and any others embarking on a 'new' phase in their lives could expect not only to hear admonitions from their elders, their employers, their tutors, their family, their patron, their clergy and their bishop but also, with the increase in literacy, from the writers of handbooks, advice manuals and exemplary literature. It was not a new phenomenon, it being an entirely human desire to wish to instruct others, to pass on advice, to warn and to encourage. The idea of the good example, the role model and the pattern for our living is present in all ages. We need look no further than the Service of Ordination and the requirement of the priest and his family to be 'wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ'. Fundamental to a concept of the perfect example is, inevitably, the life of Christ, and this will have been the major factor in the ordering of the lives of the men and women of Christendom.

The Victorian period produced an immense quantity of advice literature targeted at specific areas of society. Within this study, I intend to refer to some of the works designed for women and girls, more specifically for clergy wives and daughters and also for the clergy themselves. While there is a plethora of material in the first category, from manuals, pamphlets, articles in magazines and monthly periodicals, touching on matters of behaviour, health and hygiene, relationships, childcare, religious observance and faith, there is very little indeed which relates specifically to the wives and daughters of the clergy. It may be supposed that they would be seen, and see themselves, as part of the category of middle-class women and girls at whom so much of this literature was directed. It may be that much of this literature would not have been accessible to them, being regarded as an encouragement to elements of 'knowing' and worldliness considered inappropriate by strict parents, whether clergy or not, who took a strong view on what was read and who probably felt able to provide any such guidance as their wives or daughters might require.

Deborah Gorham in The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal considers the images and reality of women and girls in the context of the newly arrived and self-confident middle-

class with its values of 'industry, energy and uprightness'<sup>211</sup> but also its demons of anxiety, disgrace and doubt. She presents a convincing picture of the strong influence exerted by this vast array of instructional and exemplary writing, but concludes that while the more specific advice offered did change over time to meet the social advances that had been made, nevertheless, the feminine ideal remained constant throughout the period – an expectation to be 'gentle, non-assertive and subservient to men'.<sup>212</sup> It was no surprise to me, therefore, in my own searching, to discover in the works of writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis such a vehement and uncompromising view of woman's place:

An able and eloquent writer on 'woman's mission' has justly observed, that woman's strength is in her influence. And, in order to render this influence more complete, you will find, on examination, that you are by nature endowed with peculiar faculties – with a quickness of perception, facility for adaptation, and acuteness of feeling, which fit you especially for the post you have to act in life; and which, at the same time, render you, in a higher degree than men, susceptible both of pain and pleasure.<sup>213</sup>

These words of Sarah Stickney Ellis in The Daughters of England, one of a series of volumes devoted to categories of women – wives, mothers, daughters and, first of all, 'women', paint a picture which is, on the one hand accepting of women's subjection to men, but on the other claiming for women a moral superiority. In an earlier volume she had defined 'women' as 'that estimable class of females who might be more specifically denominated 'women' (than 'ladies') and yet who enjoy the privilege of liberal education, with exemption from the pecuniary necessities of labour'.<sup>214</sup> In defining her terms, she was probably also identifying her readership – the quantity of young, and older women who were, by nature of their social position, debarred from paid work except in limited areas, and who were denied a status of their own except in relation to men – their husbands or their fathers.

Her concern for women was that they would understand their position, that they would accept it, even delight in it, but never lose sight of their ultimate superiority. It is a poor

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<sup>211</sup> Deborah Gorham (1982) The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal. p 3.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid p 210.

<sup>213</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis (1842) The Daughters of England, p 12

<sup>214</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis (1839) The Women of England. . preface

deal, for it fails to address the resentment that such statements, oft repeated, might engender in generations of women. On the one hand she makes the position clear,

It is quite possible you may have more talent, with higher attainments, and you may also have been generally more admired; but this has nothing whatever to do with your position as a woman, which is, and must be, inferior to his as a man.<sup>215</sup>

but then goes on, in other chapters, describing other attributes, to continue to suggest that women are of a higher nature.

It must be borne in mind, that man's love, even in its happiest exercise, is not like woman's; for while she employs herself through every hour, in fondly weaving one beloved image into all her thoughts; he gives to her comparatively few of his, and of these neither the loftiest nor the best.<sup>216</sup>

But, if these attitudes were those promoted by such advice-givers as Sarah Stickney Ellis in the middle of the century, they carry a subtly different message from those of the writer of Hints for a clergyman's wife only a few years before.:

The distinguishing characteristics of the female are tenderness and compassion. These qualities when combined with active and persevering diligence, and stimulated by love of her Divine Saviour, will render the services of the clergyman's wife highly useful to her husband, especially if his church lie in a country parish.<sup>217</sup>

To this writer, it is the woman's ability to contribute and not her sense of personal worth which is the issue here. It might be of value to consider also the quantity of writing in pamphlets and sermons on women's rights and duties that emerged throughout the century, indicating that it was an issue that provoked both men and women to state their case. Among these are Women's rights and the wife at home, by a womanly woman (1872), Women's rights and duties considered with relation to their influence on society and on her own condition as a woman (1840) and Woman, her rights and duties (1890). It was evidently an issue that would not go away and the views of these anonymous pamphleteers contributed to the debate carried out through advice literature, sermons and suffrage and anti-suffrage campaigns. Such a statement as 'The subordination of

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<sup>215</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis (1843) The Wives of England. p 17

<sup>216</sup> *ibid* p 151

<sup>217</sup> Anon. (1832) Hints to a Clergyman's Wife p 1-2

women is a law of nature, their slavery and depression is not,<sup>218</sup> was capable of provoking all sides of the argument in its interpretation.

Women who married clergy were certain to be no strangers to Christ's teaching and would, indeed, be expected not only to emulate it but to convey much of the same to their own children, their servants, the schoolchildren they taught and the women and families in the cottages they visited or in the working parties or thrift clubs they organised. They were not without guidance or indeed role models. There is a problem about the transmutability of examples and role models. To what extent did Jesus' example travel through time and space and across gender? Given that his ardent disciple, St Paul, had some fairly negative things to say about women, one might wonder, but then Jesus did not exclude women; he numbered them among his friends, he respected them as with his mother at the wedding at Canaan; he treated them with sensitivity as with the woman with the jar of ointment and the woman being stoned for adultery; he challenged them as with the woman at the well. His famous discourse with Martha and Mary<sup>219</sup> goes further, in declaring that 'the better part' was that of Mary the listener, rather than Martha the practical, doing 'women's things' in the kitchen and making a fuss about it. Just because he was celibate did not mean he lived outside the normal life of ordinary people, and just because he was the Messiah did not mean that he failed to appreciate the part that women could play in ministry, the bringing in of the Kingdom and in the great honour of giving birth to God's son.

This does show up two possible routes for women in the bringing in of Christ's kingdom. There is clear evidence, in the Martha and Mary story, for an acceptance of women as spiritual beings, able to ponder on holy matters and to play an intellectually active part in the furtherance of the kingdom. In none of Jesus' encounters with women is one conscious of his treating them as second class or setting any constraints upon them, other than those of marital fidelity and a requirement not to sin. The other route is one not prescribed by him – that of the supporter, the practical helper, the provider... the wife. He admonishes Martha for being 'cumbered about much serving' – presumably he

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<sup>218</sup> Anon (1840) Women's rights and duties considered with relation to their influence on society and on her own condition as a woman. p 266

<sup>219</sup> Luke VII vv 44-46

graciously accepted her hospitality with all it entailed but was acknowledging that there were better things she could do.

In the wandering life that Jesus and his disciples lived, they must have been constantly accepting hospitality and a welcome in a variety of different homes. It was a custom of the time and the culture and we read very little about the homes he visited, except those of Peter in Galilee and the household of Martha, Mary and Lazarus in Bethany. Apart from the 'better part' incident, these are mentioned because of miracles conducted there – the raising of Lazarus and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, but again, when visiting the house of a Pharisee, he brings up the issue of a woman's religious devotion and uses it as a comparison. In this instance, it is the woman washing his feet with her tears, anointing them with her precious oil and drying them with her hair. Rather than chastising her for this, even in those times, extravagant and 'over the top' demonstration, Jesus accepts what she offers but goes on to contrast it with the welcome received from the Pharisee and his household, their failure to wash his feet or to make the usual provisions that hospitality demanded.<sup>220</sup> We might assume that this host was too concerned with what his guest had to say to concern himself about the niceties, but their absence did not pass unnoticed. One could read into this the real nub of expectations of women's devotion (and more especially that of clergy wives) in that the spiritual engagement is vital but it does not so much replace the domestic, as, ideally exist alongside. In other words, a true Christian wife will fulfil both roles, the earnest disciple and the dedicated provider.

However, we have moved on, through a time of women evangelists and martyrs in the early church, through centuries of female divines, women taking the monastic life, missionaries and women simply worshipping. In the time and culture under discussion we have moved to a situation where the clergy (at least the Anglican clergy) is male and permitted to be married; more than permitted, even encouraged. as expressed in 'Owlet of Owlestone Edge ... 'If the parson would but marry!'"<sup>221</sup> The role for women within the Anglican church is defined as worshipper and in some cases parish worker, visitor of the sick, Bible woman, Sunday School teacher. These are roles that could be adopted by young or old, married or single women. In non-conformity clergy could be married and

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<sup>220</sup> Luke Ch 7 vv 36-50



women could in some cases preach. In the Roman church, the priests were not married but women could take the veil and adopt the contemplative or missionary life. Even Anglican women could join one of the several orders of sisterhoods and lead a life of service and sacrifice. While the concept of the 'priesthood of all believers' was not universal, nevertheless, in all aspects of the Christian church in England, there was a place for women among the laity and, in some cases, the non-stipendiary ministry.

These expectations of the role of women, and, more particularly clergy wives, might seem altogether acceptable and appropriate but the reality was not always as comfortable as might have been expected. If a girl had been brought up within a clerical family, the 'framing and fashioning' would have prepared her for a continuation of her role as wife to a clergyman, with all the additional expectations that might involve. As late as 1896, this concern about preparation and training was still a matter for concern as witness a paper given by Mrs Herbert to a Women's Meeting at that year's Church Congress:

It is a matter of common lament that our clergy themselves are woefully deficient in training when they enter on their sacred office – what can we say of their wives! Taken, for the most part from homes of ease and luxury; having too often never faced the great responsibility of the gift of life at all; but lived on contentedly in a succession of pleasant days filled by tennis and cycling, light reading and amateur art, supervision of their own dress and social engagements.<sup>222</sup>

This is certainly a situation not uncommon within this research and brings together not only the lack of clergy preparation but also the unworldliness of young women taking on a heavy responsibility with no training themselves. It further underlines the difference in situation between women from non-clergy families 'marrying-in' as opposed to clergy daughters marrying clergy. For them, all the benefits of 'framing and fashioning' provide the ideal apprenticeship, both in terms of acceptance of low income, necessary skills and understanding of the duties implicit in such a relationship. Mrs Herbert goes on to say:

What a heroic break from this if their life as a clergyman's wife is to be fully embraced. In becoming a priest's wife a woman assumes great honour, but she takes on her shoulders a very real

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<sup>221</sup> F E Paget (1856) *The Owlet of Owlestone Edge* p 118

<sup>222</sup> Mrs Herbert (1896) *The duties of a clergyman's wife* Paper given at the Church Congress. In *The Churchwoman* October 16<sup>th</sup> 1896. p 67

yoke. In every department of life she must put the soul before the body – Church life before family life. She must become Christ's slave.<sup>223</sup>

We have already encountered the testimony of Martha Sherman, wife of a Reading vicar. She was delighted at the prospect of her first home 'it is just what a minister's should be, neat, genteel and cheerful'<sup>224</sup> but she was not a clergy daughter, she had not had the training that was to prepare her for these 'expectations', and was consequently, extremely anxious. This anxiety was exacerbated by her unfortunate encounter with parish expectations as we have already read (see chapter Rectory Culture). She had a deep sense of deficiency in the qualifications she thought the cause of Christ required of a minister's wife. She did, however, weather this inauspicious start to her marriage, formed societies, raised money, reared children and carried out her role as wife and mother to a clergyman on the move, not only within this country but abroad. She endured the premature death of children but, at the age of 42, she died of consumption. Her example, however, despite her lack of training, was that which was remembered of her:

A lady heard some poor women speaking of Mrs Sherman. One of them said ... 'there she is, the dear creature, she is like Jesus Christ'.

'What do you mean?' said another. 'I know she is very good, but why is she like Jesus Christ?'

'Because' replied the first, 'she never despises anyone and has always a smile and a kind word for everyone'.<sup>225</sup>

There is, in this account, a salutary reminder that Christ's example was intended for both men and women and that women's biblical role models did not have to be limited to biblical women. The Sermon on the Mount is not directed at men but at all who hear. It therefore, is a limitation to consider women as subservient. The worry is, however, that if women felt themselves so, then they merely contributed to the patriarchal view of their society and their time and did themselves and other women no service at all. As in so many areas of women's progress, it has been the women themselves who having absorbed the prevailing male perception of themselves, have so much hindered women's

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<sup>223</sup> Mrs Herbert (1896) *The duties of a clergyman's wife* Paper given at the Church Congress. In *The Churchwoman* October 16<sup>th</sup> 1896. p 67

<sup>224</sup> Rev Sherman (1848) *The Pastor's Wife* p28

advance, and a large amount of the exemplary literature has continued and confirmed this view.

Herbert again in A Country Parson<sup>226</sup>. (see pp 31 and 65) was concerned that it was not simply the priest himself but his wife and family who were the influences over their community. (His writing would have to be regarded among the advice literature for clergy and indeed for their families given that he was still in print and apparently read during the period of this study). He was adamant that, no matter how well the priest performed, he could be held back and his influence limited if all members of his household were not themselves equally open to scrutiny and approval. It was a firm acknowledgement of the exemplary model, that which has dominated (and probably daunted) the lives of so many clergy families. There is a strong suggestion in his writing that a man who cannot organise and control his family will stand little chance of exerting a positive influence on his flock. Herbert set the parson's wife a hard task, with her husband, of making their household a 'copy and model for his Parish'. He saw the matter as simple, but then the problem for the Nineteenth Century clergy was that it was no longer as simple to live among a parish and provide the kind of example they sought, particularly in industrial areas.

It may be interesting to note at this point that, in 1625 when Herbert was writing, the whole concept of clergy marriage and vicarage families was in its comparative infancy. It was only the post-reformation clergy who were able to marry and there had not yet sufficiently developed the 'rectory culture' that was to dominate a certain portion of English eighteenth and nineteenth century society. Therefore, to set down some basic expectations at that time must have seemed reasonable. By the early nineteenth century, the publishing houses bristled with little handbooks produced by clergy for the clergy, in order to aid them in the carrying out of their duties. There was a need for this for, beyond the requirement for a university education (which would include philosophy, theology and classics), there was little actual training for Anglican priests. A fellowship in an Oxford college surrounded by dons and students was no real preparation for life in a village or town surrounded by a mixed community of gentry and workers, or an urban parish shuddering from the changes brought about by industrialisation. Consequently,

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<sup>225</sup> *ibid* p 452

such booklets do probably provide some valuable advice to young, or indeed not so young men taking holy orders and emerging into the parochial system. It was not that there had been no recognition of the fact that the university life alone was insufficient training; there were indeed men in orders who had not even been to university, but there had been little recognition of the fact that such training might need to be formalised and provision made for it. Foundations in Edinburgh (1810), St Bee's, a college for non-university men (1816), the CMS college in Islington (1825) and a shared seminary for medical and theological students at Birmingham (1828) began to provide some structure on to which to build the practical requirements of a vocation. Samuel Wilberforce brought the notion of good parish management and pastoral efficiency into his own parishes and diocese but further extended this by the establishment of Cuddesdon Theological College in 1854. His sermons at ordination of his students give the flavour of the kind of clergyman he was keen to prepare for the task of parish priest.

Some of the handbooks do take account of wives and subsequent families. Some dwell only on matters which relate to preaching, teaching and the fulfilling of 'duties' but some do refer to other requirements that a parish might make, those of visiting, teaching, catechising, counselling and training servants and helpers. It is implicit in much of this that these are tasks that might well be undertaken by a woman, and that quite probably that woman might be a wife, but somehow writers fail to actually mention them. John Henry Blunt, another clergyman much read by his colleagues in the mid-century in his Directorium Pastorale: Principles and Practice of Pastoral Work in the Church of England<sup>227</sup> outlines in immense detail all the practical requirements and problems facing the parish priest. Throughout the book there is no mention however, of the priest's personal life and when at last, in the chapter on Schools, there is the suggestion of a wife, it is entirely as a bonus: 'Very few clergymen will be able to do anything in an infant school which the mistress cannot do as well or better..... But if he is fortunate enough to possess such a treasure as a good clergyman's wife, sister or mother ....'<sup>228</sup> Blunt goes on to say that 'the most available form of lay help which the clergyman may find at his

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<sup>226</sup> George Herbert (1625) The Country Parson

<sup>227</sup> J. H. Blunt (1864) Directorium Pastorale: Principles and Practice of Pastoral Work in the Church of England ..

<sup>228</sup> J. H. Blunt (1864) Directorium Pastorale: Principles and Practice of Pastoral Work in the Church of England p 297

disposal is that offered by ladies of the higher middle classes, many of whom do, and many more wish to, devote their lives to works of charity'.<sup>229</sup> The possibility of a clergyman falling prey to philanthropically motivated women does arise, though it is addressed principally in fiction. Margaret Watt in The Parson's Wife in History comments that 'one of the most delicate functions of the parson's wife must surely be the tactful handling of her husband's devotees, for such are to be reckoned with'<sup>230</sup>, but the fact that a man whose whole education and beyond had been in the company of men might find managing women a bit of a problem does not appear within the exhortational sermons given to the newly ordained.

Alfred Gatty, in his The Vicar and his Duties of 1858 questions the continued validity of George Herbert in a country no longer rural and among a populace no longer bound by the traditions and conventions of village life, with its strong influence of squire and parson – a combination known and worked with over a long period of time. This little book of 'sketches' strikes a very modern note. It lays the blame for the move away from the church by the working classes firmly at the door of that same church and its failure to cope with or prepare for the demographic changes brought about by the industrial and agrarian revolutions. He deals with many of the recognised requirements of the parson – visiting, preaching, dispensing medicine, attending the sick and dying, teaching in school, running thrift and clothing clubs and yet, as in so many other books, there is no mention of a clergyman's family or a possible wife. It is as if the man might do all these things himself – indeed he might but the likelihood is not great, and this failure to allow that such considerable demands and burdens might be shared continues to puzzle me. What renders all this the more incomprehensible is the fact that the Rev. Gatty did have a wife whom we have already mentioned as being, along with his daughters, deeply involved in parish work but also helping sustain the parson himself by their additions to his income. Gatty's account and many others are so at odds with Herbert's requirement for a whole family involvement that one is tempted to question whether, if there were any expectations of clergy wives and daughters, how were they to know about them?

The answer to this question came in the discovery of one slim booklet published in 1832 Hints for a Clergyman's Wife practically illustrated, It is anonymous but it does set out, in

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<sup>229</sup> ibid p 322-3

the greatest detail and most methodically, all the many aspects of the life of a clergyman's wife and how she might conduct her public and her personal life to the glory of God, the good of the parish and the betterment of her husband and family. It acknowledges that the role of clergy wife is a hard one and that its exemplary nature may impose more constraints than experienced by other professional or middle class wives:

Others may seek to shine in the crowded assembly, others may waste 'the fleeting moments of too short a life' in the insipid routine of fashionable amusements. Her joy will be of a higher nature.<sup>231</sup>

It is this aspect of joy that is so very important, that a life of service and duty can be one of great happiness. There was Catharine Tait, later in the century:

'Duty for her was not merely the result of admirable parental training in that well-ordered home, it was an instinct.'<sup>232</sup>

and in the dying years of the century a delegate at the Church Congress declaring that: 'There was no happier life than that of a clergyman's wife. It was a life full of interest, of healthy activity and of mutual love and service'.<sup>233</sup>

But to return to 'Hints', the writer, while setting out the many and varied categories of work and concern for the clergyman's wife, is clear about one essential element:

The Clergyman's wife who is truly anxious to fulfil the duties of her station, will feel interested in the well-being of every individual in her husband's parish, (but in order not to) ... overstep the bounds of her own department of exertion she must concentrate on the female part of it.<sup>234</sup>

But even within this limitation that list of tasks or responsibilities is a long one including:

- the visitation of the sick particularly where female attendance was especially needed. Since this was for the patients' temporal as well as spiritual well-being,

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<sup>230</sup> Margaret Watt (1943) The Parson's Wife in History. p 86

<sup>231</sup> Anon (1830) Hints to a clergyman's wife. . P 6

<sup>232</sup> Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 203

<sup>233</sup> Mrs Wodehouse (1896) Paper to The Women's Meeting at the Church Congress. Reported in The Churchwoman. October 16<sup>th</sup> 1896 p 67

<sup>234</sup> Anon. (1832) Hints to a clergyman's wife. p 114

she is advised to use Reece's Medical Guide ('an excellent directory for the clergyman's wife')<sup>235</sup>

- cottage readings – but with a caveat to respect the lifestyle and convenience of the poor in her choice of time for visiting. Here there is a shared advice with George Herbert, who was anxious to remind his readers that, in their own home, the cottagers were due all respect and deference.<sup>236</sup>
- Sunday School, particularly the girls and young women. At this period, it is to be remembered that the 'weekly school' served a larger purpose than just a child's worship session but was often the only source of education available to many children and adults. Consequently, the demands on the Sunday School staff, who might only consist of the clergyman's wife and, maybe, her daughters, were for a basic general education or for a continuation for those who had had little time in school. The writer of Hints is clear that 'reading, writing and accounts are the only branches of education absolutely necessary for children in the lower classes of life'.<sup>237</sup> but goes on to add to the list plain work, knitting, mending, darning and the need to pay particular attention to needlework in lace-making districts where 'children are usually set to their lace-pillows as soon as they have left the school'. There is also a suggestion that education, particularly reading, could be extended to older members of the parish, for whom learning had been restricted, and was now limited by the constraints of age because 'it can be a delight to aged widows to be able to read the Bible'<sup>238</sup>
- preparation for Confirmation – here the writer is concerned about 'female bashfulness and timidity' which might prevent a candidate being able to respond well to the clergy but who might be more sensitively examined by his wife

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<sup>235</sup> *ibid* p 78

<sup>236</sup> According to Russell (*The Clerical Profession* 1984) 'the picture of the managing clergyman and his formidable wife ruling the local community dates from this period' p 178. He cites Joseph Arch, the agricultural reformer, whose mother disobeyed the vicar's wife and was excluded from all parish charity thereafter.

<sup>237</sup> Anon (1832) *Hints to a clergyman's wife* p 107

<sup>238</sup> *ibid* p 109

- instruction and preparation of servants. This seems to have been a common situation. Potential servants might spend time at the parsonage in order to be prepared for service in other houses. There is ,within this requirement, also a note that the responsibility for the servant's whole person was with the employer and this therefore, included provision for spiritual as well as moral and physical welfare.

The tasks themselves carry a sub-text of other responsibilities which could appear truly daunting. There are also more subtle and all-pervading requirements: the need to ascertain the state of the parish, to respond to its problems and sensitivities, to know its people, the names of the children, the occupations and interests of their parents for 'the poor are very susceptible to kindly feeling'<sup>239</sup> In addition to this is the inevitable exemplary role of the clergy family – 'the minister's family will ever be regarded as the model upon which the families of the parish are to be framed'<sup>240</sup> But if this all-consuming role requirement were not sufficient, the writer of Hints has yet one more area of extreme importance, something not always mentioned or outlined as an essential in other advice material, that of the woman's own individuality, something of herself that she can develop alongside all the daily tasks. It seems a tall order and yet it is there, present, in the life accounts of the women in this thesis. And even this requirement is not a simple one but, as ever, multi-faceted. Such a woman must pay attention to her own spiritual life if she is to be of any value in the guidance of others. This is understood but again it requires time set aside for private devotions. Then there are 'her' causes, those areas of interest which for her have especial relevance or importance, and there are the skills or pleasures that are an enrichment to any life and which need to be practised if they are not to be lost. We might include within this area, when we come to consider the three principal women in this study, Catharine Tait's passion for poetry, Catherine Marsh's knitting and crochet and Henrietta Barnett's painting accepted by the Royal Academy in her old age.

So many of these requirements seem to be an inseparable part of the ministry yet provided, through a female presence, a less intimidating and more gentle aspect. It presents a requirement for a married clergy and gives importance to the role played by a

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<sup>239</sup> *ibid* p 63



woman within such a marriage and such a calling. It does, therefore, surprise me that, amongst so many handbooks of the period, there should only be this one dedicated solely to clergy wives. What it requires and advises so closely matches, in categories of service, the clergy handbooks on parochial duties. This is, I believe, an essential and important issue in answering the question as to whether marriage to a clergyman is 'more than a marriage'.

### 5. A clever girl at the vicarage<sup>241</sup>: dreams and expectations of some clergy daughters.

She was born one of that class which occupies so anomalous a position in our social system who sometimes rise to the highest places among the nobles of the land, and sometimes, alas! sink into the lowest depths of vice. . . . clergymen's daughters.<sup>242</sup>

This quote, from a novel of the period, does not promise an encouraging image or stereotype for the women in our study. It is to be wondered how such an image had been created, for it seems to have little to do with the daughters of clergymen I have encountered in my research. Nevertheless, an image, even an untrue or unfaithful one, is a representation of a public perception and it is often with a perception of clergy daughters that these women have had to live. With this in mind, therefore, I would like to look at a selection of daughters of the clergy, at their lives as chronicled by their biographers and their images as portrayed by those who knew them. It is then to be considered how appropriate any stereotype will prove to be.

Daughters of the Victorian clergy were written about in a number of ways. Firstly, they figure in admonitions and exhortational literature as part of clergy households and members of an incumbent's family. Just as the priest makes a promise at his ordination to set a good example by his life and conduct, so his family is included in this promise and thereafter takes up its position on a pedestal - an uncomfortably public position. Most of such admonitions in handbooks and books of guidance for the clergy do address themselves to the clergy themselves, or occasionally to the wife and mother. In the 1832 handbook Hints to a Clergyman's Wife, all requirements for exemplary conduct are addressed to her:

Your family is to be a picture of what you wish other families to be: and without the most determined resolution. . . . cost what it will, your recommending family religion to others will create but a smile.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> '... a remote rural parish in the days of Victoria and Albert as seen by a clever girl at the vicarage.' Description by G.M.Trevelyan in introduction to Mary Marshall (1947) What I Remember. p ix

<sup>242</sup> C. H. Knox (1841) Hardness (or The Uncle) Vol II p.65

<sup>243</sup> Anon (1832) Hints to a Clergyman's Wife Anon. p 35

Chapter and verse- A clever girl at the vicarage: dreams and expectations of some clergy daughters

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Nor is the ubiquitous George Herbert without admonitions on the role of children who are sons and daughters of the clergy. His rules were relatively simple – ‘he first makes them Christians, then Common-wealths-men... Therefore, having seasoned them with all Piety, not only of words in praying, and reading: but in actions, in visiting other sick children, and tending their wounds, and sending his charity by them to the poor. And sometimes giving them a little money to do it of themselves, that they get a delight in it’<sup>244</sup> He further goes on to suggest that, in apprenticing them to trades, (note that he refers at no time just to sons), he warns against the choice of taverners or lace-makers whose trades ‘for the most part serve but the vices and vanities of the world, which he is to deny, and not to augment.’ While some of this advice is anachronistic for families in the nineteenth century, nevertheless, there is contained within it a serious intention that ‘duty’ in terms of parochial and pastoral involvement, is something appropriate to both sexes but that, also, a preparation for life should involve paid work, though some sons may follow their father into holy orders. He also points out that servants should be religious because they will be better servants, being so. His requirement for evangelical outreach he imposes on wife, children and servants ‘so that, as in the house of those that are skill’d in Musick, all are Musicians so in the house of a Preacher, all are preachers’. If this all sounds too archaic and Seventeenth Century for our Nineteenth Century women, then we have to consider that it is clergy of the Nineteenth Century who are referring their colleagues to George Herbert’s work and his requirement for the kind of example the whole clergy family should set.

Herbert refers to daughters in terms of their possible employment (i.e. not to become lacemakers) but there is no separation of tasks in the matter of duty. Children are regarded as ‘the family’ and, as such, all parish duties such as teaching and visitation of the sick do not carry a gender-related label.. There was little expectation of the education of girls in seventeenth century families beyond basic literacy and the accomplishment of household tasks while boys were taught or tutored, away or at home. Two centuries later, this area of family life seems not to have altered much despite the monumental changes all around. Sons of the clergy increasingly went away to school but their sisters remained at home, or, at best, were able to go for brief periods to a day-

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<sup>244</sup> George Herbert (1625) (1898) *The Country Parson* p 38

school.<sup>245</sup> While this may be seen to have been a less productive set of alternatives (staying at home taught by mother, a short spell at a boarding or day school or a longer period in the Spartan regime of a Clergy Daughters' School) there are others who have viewed the outcomes more positively:

It was the girls who were the greatest beneficiaries in a day when educational opportunities for them were rare. Clerical daughters probably had some of the best education of their time in their own fathers' studies.<sup>246</sup>

The author of 'Hints ' does not single out daughters from sons but their opportunities and experiences were quite different and it is upon the daughters of the family that the principal and enduring privilege or burden of setting an example must be laid.

It is here that we must first encounter a difference between clergy daughters and daughters of other middle class families. While most middle-class girls might have lessons and learn the skills of needlework, painting and music, as well as having time to play and be left to their own devices when lessons were done, working class girls were prepared from infancy to contribute to the family's effectiveness, either by learning skills that would earn money, or by taking on duties and responsibilities in the home that would allow their mother and others to do so. These skills they learned, predominantly, from their mothers. So, just as the daughter of the lace-maker learned at her mother's knee to wield her bobbin and move her pins into the light, so the clergy daughter learned to follow many elements of her mother's occupation. Just like the daughters of the poor, these girls were apprenticed at their mother's knee - working women from an early age in an occupation from which not even marriage might rescue them. True, for them there was no requirement, or indeed any possibility of earning money, but, in many other aspects what they learned was every bit as serious and important in the successful functioning of the family.

So many clergy families described in biographies seem to fit the requirements of the writers of handbooks, one might think such behaviour was automatic or easy. What is nearer the truth is that, like all children, clergy children had difficulties, bursts of temper,

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<sup>245</sup> Some clergy daughters were catered for in special schools as the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge so graphically described by Charlotte Bronte in Jane Eyre.

Chapter and verse- A clever girl at the vicarage: dreams and expectations of some clergy daughters

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arguments and disagreements but that such things were rarely chronicled until what Margaret Watt in The History of the Parson's Wife calls 'our less reticent and more truthful age.'<sup>247</sup> However, many do describe their childhood, in large families, before the boys went away to school, in terms which sound idyllic and the requirements to learn and take on social and philanthropic duties are not represented as onerous. After all, from the subjective view of the child, that which happens in the home is deemed the norm until such time as distance or objectivity reveals it not to be. Mary Paley was born in 1850, the second child of Henry Paley, Rector of a parish five miles from Stamford in Lincolnshire. She recounts her childhood in her biography What I Remember :

'Until I was ten years old there were three of us, my sister being two years older and my brother two years younger than myself. He was my great chum: we took long walks and climbed trees and collected birds' eggs (we only took one out of each nest), and I can still feel the thrill of discovering a fresh egg to add to our collection, and the terror of thrusting my bare arm into a sand martin's long, dark hole when there might be a peck from the bird at the end.'<sup>248</sup>

Flora Mayor, a fellow student of Newnham, describes her rectory childhood at Kingston Hill in Surrey in letters, principally between herself and her twin Alice and their two brothers, and recounts anecdotes of a joyful childhood unity during her first ten years. Similarly Eirene, daughter of the Rev. Henry Summerhayes of Amberley in Gloucestershire and one of seven children, tells of life with her brother. . .

'Christopher and I, when we were children, used to be 'Mr and Mrs Jones', and we used to hold tea parties. We had a little table in the window of the nursery and we had a doll's tea set, a little teapot and things and pretended - we used to make polite conversation.....When he went to school, I hobnobbed with Mary and Grace... We were all very fond of each other and when we used to go out, we always stuck together. People used to say when we went to parties, 'Oh, the Summerhayes family, they stick together.' Still we did'<sup>232</sup>

One can find accounts of similarly close clergy families in published and unpublished journals and biographies, the famous being not excluded, as witness this account by

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<sup>246</sup> A B Baldwin (1933) The Penroses of Fledborough Parsonage. P 197

<sup>247</sup> Margaret Watt (1943) The History of the Parson's Wife p113

<sup>248</sup> Mary Paley Marshall (1947) What I remember pp 1-2

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Sarah Garrs, maid to the Bronte family observing the four children of the Rev. Patrick Bronte:

Their afternoon walks, as they sallied forth, each neatly and comfortably clad, were a joy. Their fun knew no bounds. It never was expressed wildly. Bright and often dry, but deep, it occasioned many a merry burst of laughter. They enjoyed a game of romps, and played with zest.<sup>249</sup>

From these brief descriptions, we catch a glimpse of a seemingly idyllic area of the 'rectory culture' common across time and distance. It was not, it would seem, any different from the childhoods of middle-class children left to their own devices by parents able to trust them, or to confide them to the care of devoted maids and house servants. They were part of large families, born in an age when it was possible to roam about the neighbouring countryside in safety, experience the wonders of nature and know the security of close family ties. Up to the age of ten it seems, this golden age could persist but from then on the difference between boys and girls suddenly intervened and brought an end, forever, to this delightful world, for this was the point when the boys would go away to school and nothing would ever be the same again

Before this change and interruption it is important to consider the children of the clergy family together before we approach the specialness of daughters. Fuller in his History of the Worthies of England<sup>250</sup>, comments that 'our English clergy have been unhappy in their offspring' and goes on to explain some possible reasons for this, their late marriage, their offspring being the children of their old age and the uncertainty engendered because no financial provision would have been made for them at their fathers' deaths. While this could be said to be true in the second half of the seventeenth century when he wrote this, at least the first had ceased to apply by the time of this study. However, what he then says retains a strong ring of truth... The Rev Harold Anson, one of eleven children of the Rev. Frederick Anson, Canon of Windsor (1811-1885) while rejoicing in the camaraderie and closeness of large families does reflect that he never remembered his parents 'other than old: I lived with people who were physically

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<sup>249</sup> Marian Harland (1899) 'Charlotte Bronte at Home' cited in Juliet Barker (1994) The Brontes pp110-111  
<sup>250</sup> Fuller (1662) The worthies of England p 57

tired...'<sup>251</sup> ' To return to Fuller: 'clergymen's children have not been more unfortunate, but more observed, than the children of the parents of other professions' They are 'a city set on a hill that cannot be hid'

It is this 'goldfish bowl' aspect of clerical family life which is significant and which must impinge more on the children than their mother because of the nature of the promises made by a cleric at ordination. It is his choice to make a pledge for himself and his own conduct, but he must also promise on behalf of his family. Based on the admonition in I Timothy 3 verse 5, 'For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?', it is understandable that such a requirement be made of the priest. It is even reasonable to extend this to his wife, for either he is already married (in which case she is party to his promise) or if he is still single it could be supposed that a woman marrying an ordained clergyman would be aware of what such a position would entail. However, this cannot be said for any children of the marriage. The promises are not theirs and, while all the normal requirements of childhood obedience and general godliness might be expected of them, there is more here, for their father will have promised, insofar as it lies within him, to make them 'wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ'. It is a position similar to that filled today by the children of royalty, of politicians and others in the public eye, one that is unproblematic as long as the pattern is wholesome and exemplary, but fraught with difficulties if they fail to live up to such requirements. If today's children in such high places are more observed because of the intrusive nature of the media, then their nineteenth century counterparts had other mirrors to their behaviour. Communities were smaller, anonymity was harder to achieve, particularly in a rural parish, and always there would be servants, local people with families in the neighbourhood, who knew the reality of life behind the vicarage door. , this could also carry a double edge for also included within the equation, could be the vicarage servants. Quesnel, quoted by Bridges in a chapter in View of the Christian Ministry<sup>252</sup> entitled 'The defect of family religion; and the want of connection of the minister's family with his work', interprets the demands of Paul's letter to Timothy by stating that:

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<sup>251</sup> Harold Anson (1938) Looking Forward p 2

<sup>252</sup> Charles Bridges (1830) The Christian Ministry p 165

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the same command was enforced by the ancient laws of the church, which were much stricter concerning Clergymen's wives, children, and servants, than those of the laity. The houses of Ministers should be the schools of virtue, little emblems of a church, and patterns for all their parishioners, of peace and good order, sobriety and devotion<sup>253</sup>.

Fuller is also quite clear about the extent of this scrutiny for:

He must expect not only his personal character, but his household arrangements – the conduct of his wife, the dress and habits of his children and servants, his furniture and his table – to be the subject of a most scrutinising observation.<sup>254</sup>

It is comforting, then, to read in so many biographical chapters, of apparently idyllic childhoods spent in vicarages, large families enjoying all the benefits of company and association but also able to shoulder the burdens and responsibilities that seem to be theirs, due to their father's calling. For some, however, there was no thought of burdens, rather of delight in the opportunity to do God's work. Maria Havergal (sister of Frances the hymn writer) had undergone a conversion experience at a very young age and was happy to use her position to be able to distribute tracts within her father's parish. In 1845, when he removed to Worcester, she set about serious and systematic parish visiting: 'My knowledge of the hundreds of poor, the names of every man, woman and child, was a great help to my father...'<sup>255</sup> It was possible for a daughter to have quite an opposite effect and make a negative contribution to her father's ministry. In Family Fortunes there is mention of this effect...'in how many cases is the influence of a godly Pastor weakened, when the villagers observe the flippant modern manners and showy dress of his daughters.'<sup>256</sup>

There is another image of clergy daughters portrayed in Addison's The English Country Parson which is a contrast to the 'earnestness' of many women in clergy families and those who sought to influence them. 'The rectory ladies of the day did a good deal of visiting and in the long evenings sat together embroidering fire-screens and bedspreads

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<sup>253</sup> Pasquier Quesnel (1719) The New Testament, with moral reflections upon every verse

<sup>254</sup> Fuller (1662) The Worthies of England p 57 p 167

<sup>255</sup> cited in Women and the Church of England (1907) Jerusha Richardson p 132

<sup>256</sup> Bishop Wilberforce (1847) cited in Family Fortunes Davidoff and Hall (1987) p123



round the parlour fire. They might do samplers too.'<sup>257</sup> He goes on to describe a limiting and somewhat claustrophobic scene of women almost captive within the rectory. He continues 'Long letters were written and received. Intimate diaries were kept. Romantic dreams were indulged in by repressed daughters, and ambitious schemes devised by spirited sons.'<sup>258</sup> Therein lies the contrast, not between the empowered or repressed daughter but between any daughter and the 'spirited sons'.

The matter of 'dress' was something that concerned some clergy families, particularly the more evangelical. It is allied to those other areas of worldly living that have tempted the godly, whether clergy family or not. Catherine Cappe, a clergy daughter of the eighteenth century, took to a simple, seemingly Puritanical dress, grey dress, white collar and cap, for the majority of her life. Mary Fletcher, another of her contemporaries and not a clergy daughter, had also had to face this question long before she actually became a clergy wife. Being sought and courted as any young woman in society, she took the decision to adopt a more sober style of dress, in order to give a clearer message that it was not the worldly and physical elements of her person that she valued but something more spiritual and less influenced by decoration or beauty. It was also not just a question of not wearing low necklines or lace collars or pretty jewellery but the nature of the activities that could make up the social life of families, both in the country and the town. There was the question of balls, theatres, dancing, parties, reading novels – all staples of nineteenth century middle class society and, undoubtedly, there were devout clergy daughters who did dress prettily, enjoyed dancing and led a life very similar, in social terms, to the daughters of any other middle class or professional family. It would be tempting to conclude that evangelical families were more likely to be strict about such things. Such a conclusion would marry well with a contention that the Church of England was more worldly but this would be too general an assumption to make. A requirement for modesty of dress was fairly common but the matter of dancing and public entertainment was frowned on not so much for its supposed intrinsic immorality as for the kind of associations attendance at such events might encourage. The mothers of daughters in Jane Austen's world would have found themselves sorely tried if the fertile

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<sup>257</sup> Sir Wilkinson Addison (1947) The English Country Parson p 168

<sup>258</sup> Sir Wilkinson Addison (1947) The English Country Parson

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meeting ground of Assembly Rooms and country balls had been denied their girls. Jane Austen, herself a 'clever girl at the vicarage', had no problem in writing about an environment which she undoubtedly knew at first hand.

We are, in these circumstances, viewing from a distance people who were themselves subject to several different sets of expectations. Parental, and particularly paternal requirements, may have hinged upon the admonitions of George Herbert and those interpreters of his theology who set high standards for all the clergy family. There might also be social expectations, the vicarage family being part of the social fabric of the rural community and, therefore, expected to interact socially with the family at the Hall and others in the squirearchy. Alongside these might be the quite different expectations of the parish for which the clergy family might be expected to set the moral tone. Such views might be coloured also by the existence, or not, of a non-conformist cause within the community, whose own clergy might be more strict in terms of dress and behaviour than their Anglican colleagues. There were considerable possibilities and variations. Mary Richardson's father was chaplain at Eton which provided some problems, his daughter being pretty and, eventually, not being allowed by her mother to attend chapel because of the bad effect of her prettiness on the boys. Removal to Kent saw her confirmed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and 'coming out' at a public ball in Sittingbourne. However, a further move to a parish in St John's Wood did not provide the social advantages one might have expected. Indeed, she records 'had it not been that we continued to stay in Kent and visit our relations and to go about paying visits among friends, and that they took us to balls etc. we should have had a very dull time, for there was literally no one in St John's Wood for us to associate with.' An example of one who managed to straddle both worlds could be Catharine Spooner (later Tait), daughter of the evangelical Archdeacon of Coventry, devoted Christian daughter and, ultimately, wife, who, nevertheless, having an uncle resident at the Hall, another a baronet, another an MP, could find a ball to be 'delicious' but who read widely all her life, novels, poetry, plays as well as history, theology and devotional works and was able and happy to share not only her father's parish work but to discuss with him and with the many visitors to the Rectory, the works she and her father had read together.

The special nature of clergy daughters probably did lie in the different life paths determined by the boys' departure to school while the girls remained either at home to

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continue their education with their mother, their governess, as tutor to their younger siblings or at some local daytime academy. Many young women may have resented the fact that, regardless of ability or inclination, it was the boy who learned the Latin and Greek, grappled with geometry and algebra, the rough and tumble of team games and the challenges of a communal life, while their sisters continued much as before, taking on more responsibility and more constraint as the years marched on. In the combined biographies of Margaret Gatty and Juliana Ewing, Mrs Gatty comments on this division of labour and entitlement: 'We are doing all we can over the boys' education, looking upon it as money laid out to interest. The girls are pretty well; they teach and visit the sick and are as good as four curates.'<sup>259</sup> It did indeed seem that for the boys there was freedom while for the girls there was constriction – of behaviour, of association, of activity and of expectation.

The plight of the middle class girl and, particularly, her education, was taken up by the Taunton Report in 1862. Working class girls had had some access to education since the introduction of the National and British Schools early in the century and subsequent governments had allowed money for the education of the populace by qualified and certificated teachers. Middle class girls, however, were at the mercy of a multiplicity of private girls schools and might be taught by unqualified teachers, or more commonly at home by their mothers (to the extent of their own education), governesses and in some circumstances by their fathers. For clergy daughters this at least should have meant a good option, for their fathers were educated and there would have been books and a value in education. This was not universally the case, however, and there were clergy who were as unenlightened as any about the need to consider their daughters alongside their sons. Emily Davies was a case in point and one who grew increasingly angry at the different opportunities given to her and her brothers<sup>260</sup>. In the eyes of John Ruskin, it was not just about a difference of opportunity but a difference of value and seriousness that parents might put upon the different educational experiences of their sons and daughters:

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<sup>259</sup> Christobel Maxwell (1949) *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*. p 115

<sup>260</sup> Margaret Forster (1984) *Significant Sisters*. p139

.. but what teachers do you give your girls, and what reverence do you show to the teachers you have chosen? Is a girl likely to think her own conduct or her own intellect of much importance, when you trust the entire formation of her character moral and intellectual, to a person whom you let your servant s treat with less respect than they do your housekeeper.<sup>261</sup>

But this was not so for all, and, indeed, there were girls whose education was enriched and enhanced by being left with access to a father's library and his personal tuition in classical subjects. Among these was Mary Paley, daughter of the Rev Henry Paley, first student at Newnham and the original 'clever girl at the vicarage'. Cleverness was not, however, a desirable attribute in a daughter. Matilda Betham, daughter of an earlier clergyman, had an education 'concerned mainly in having free access to her father's fine library, and in a little occasional teaching from him.'<sup>262</sup> She was actually sent to school but only 'to learn sewing, and prevent a too strict application to books' for her mother feared that she would never find a husband if she continued to be so clever. Mary Paley was not of her generation but still there was this feeling that she should not be a trouble to anyone. 'For serious discussion she would leave the dining room to the men, or the visitor would go upstairs to the study and no most ignorant Miss could not have pretended less than she to academic attainment.'<sup>263</sup> Nevertheless, she did go to Cambridge even if, afterwards, she married and therefore did not have a career, but worked alongside her husband who remained a Cambridge don. Flora Mayor and Mary Sheepshanks were later clergy daughters who followed the same path. Flora Mayor's life had been privileged, with all the security of a well-to-do academic home. Her novel The Rector's Daughter mirrors, to some extent her own life once she had returned from university, had lost her fiancé to disease in India, and thereafter sought some sense of usefulness as her father's amanuensis. John Masefield in writing her obituary described her as being 'not so much wasted as not used.'<sup>264</sup> Jane Lewis in Women and Social Action quotes Clara Collet, another Newnhamite: 'why did we never learn at Newnham that we should be women some day, not merely sponges to absorb knowledge and give

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<sup>261</sup> John Ruskin (1907) 'Of Queens' Gardens' in Sesame and Lilies. p 65

<sup>262</sup> M Bethan-Edwards (1880) Six Life-studies of Famous Women. p 235

<sup>263</sup> Mary Paley Marshall (1947) What I remember p xi.

<sup>264</sup> John Masefield in preface to F M Mayor (1913) The Third Miss Symonds in Merryan Williams (1987) Six Women Novelists p 47

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it out again?'<sup>265</sup> It was indeed a dilemma, as much for any educated young woman as for clergy daughters, for what indeed was to become of them?

However, there was great value for some clergy in having the company of an educated daughter. It would be someone with whom he could discuss theology and academic matters and it could be someone whose understanding of the requirements of the parish ministry would enable her to be an entirely suitable (and young, and energetic) assistant. This is where notions of 'unpaid curate' are bound to creep in, as so painfully illustrated in George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter where duty ultimately becomes the most satisfying and enduring motivator, even in the event of loss of faith, reputation and marriage prospects. And this might again seem more secure and more appealing than what would appear to be the alternative, given that, 'the impoverished spinster of the middle class ... had little option but to teach' and within that category there might be the immense hard work but at least independence of a village school although the more likely route might be that of governess, with all its social limitations and possibilities of loneliness and exploitation.

An inevitable consequence of these close father daughter relationships was an unwillingness to part. There are many recorded letters and diary entries of father's giving up, very unready, the support and companionship of a last daughter. David Roberts, in The Paterfamilias of the Victorian Governing Classes<sup>266</sup>, speaks of 'at least one daughter usually remaining unmarried, the special servant of the father in his old age'. However, Roberts does not add to this generalisation the nature of its consequences. Not only would this mean that one daughter was bound by duty and obligation (happy though she might be at this) to remain single and support her ageing father, it also meant that, at his death, she would be homeless and without support unless she could call upon other relatives to support her or unless she was still young and fit enough to seek and find employment in the limited field which would be deemed suitable. She would have been trained – 'fram'd and fashion'd' – to the life she was already leading, having learned her

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<sup>265</sup> Clara Collet in the Collet Papers (MSS 29/3/13/4/6) in Jane Lewis (1991) Women and Social Action p 17

<sup>266</sup> David Roberts 'The Paterfamilias of the Victorian Governing Classes' in A S Wohl (ed) (1978) The Victorian Family p 63-4

craft and skills from her earliest days and having no experience of any other kind of life. How befitted would such a woman be to go out into the world and seek her fortune?

Inevitably, the sin of pride we have already acknowledged has no place in the vicarage but loss of pride can mean loss of respect if a seemingly independent woman, head of a household, manager of a parish even, carer and nursemaid to the elderly, is faced with the prospect of being passed from the household of one sister or brother to another as an alternative to a meagre post as governess to young children, having had none of her own and being more in the age range of their grandmother. Nevertheless, this is exactly what Catherine Marsh did with regards to passing from household to household. The difference was that she appears to have been happily welcomed at each of the different parsonage houses in which she set up residence after her father's death. The other factor was that, through her writing and presumably through some small income of her own, she did have some financial independence. The fact that there must have been many such women without such recompenses and that their circumstances must have been very uncomfortable is found in the prose of an advertisement for the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy in the first edition of Crockford's Clerical Directory.

AGED SINGLE DAUGHTERS OF deceased clergymen, possessing not more than £500 per annum from private sources or public charities, and who are unable from age, sickness, or other cause, to earn their own maintenance, may apply to the undersigned for forms of petition to the Governors of the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy, who grant pensions from 10/- to 20/- per annum, increasing, as the funds permit, to upwards of 300 Clergy Daughters.

Daughters become eligible for election on the pension list, at 45 years of age. To those who are unsuccessful in obtaining a pension, and to others who are under 45 years of age, but incapacitated by want of health from earning their own maintenance, small donations are granted.<sup>267</sup>

It is not to be assumed that this would inevitably be the worst option. The bond between father and daughter could be so strong in both directions that it might seem preferable to that of marriage. In Catharine Tait's biography, both from her own writings and those of her father, there is every indication that she was totally happy with this prospect.

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<sup>267</sup> advertisement in Crockford's Clerical Directory 1860

However, with the arrival of Archie Tait, head of the neighbouring school at Rugby, such thoughts vanished swiftly, replaced at once with all the dreams of happy marriage and service to and alongside another clergyman, her husband. For Catherine Marsh however, this alternative did not present itself. Her role in her father's life was more complicated. She had, as so many others, filled the role of her ailing mother. She relished and excelled in all the skills of visiting, organising, teaching and preaching that such a position might require. She was also capable of running the household and managing the servants and readjusting to yet another vicarage as her father moved around. But hers was not a position with tenure, for her father hated the single life and very soon after the death of her mother, remarried, making her situation in the household suddenly redundant. This whole situation repeated itself yet again when he found a third wife. Another clergy daughter, Emily Davies, found this need to remain at home most repressing because it prevented her from stimulating contact. There is no sense, in her life, of the compensations others may have found in being the dutiful daughter and yet, she had internalised skills in her role at home and in the parish and was greatly encouraged when, in her pursuit of better education for women, she found herself able to conduct meetings and 'to her surprise she found that not only did committee work bring gratification but it also brought power.'<sup>268</sup>

I will explore in a later chapter the matter of 'single blessedness' and the unhappiness of some clergy daughters at the need to accept that the door to matrimony was no longer open to them. It was a doubly painful realisation for, while they might be regarded as not an immensely good match, given the possible low income of their fathers, there was a profusion of well-meaning but inevitably tactless literature which emphasised that woman's destiny was to be found in marriage and childbearing and that anything else was most certainly a poor substitute.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Margaret Forster (1984) Significant Sisters. p 141

<sup>269</sup> Though few were as extreme as this comment in the magazine The British Workman (November 1<sup>st</sup> 1863) 'If she be a mother, still higher, mother is her mission. If to the weak hands is entrusted the task of rearing the young immortals, for service here and glory hereafter, if the gem be given her to polish which shall one day sparkle in the crown of the Saviour, let her walk softly, for angels might envy her high vocation, and the Almighty looks to see how she is nursing the child for him'..

To make a stand for the right to remain single and qualify for a profession or a senior role in commerce, was to challenge the expected norms of the time. It questioned the subjugation of women and could not be equated with what were seen as the feminine virtues of tolerance, patience and compassion. In essence, the only way to be able to satisfy all of these was through the medium of philanthropy and, in the form of role models like Louisa Twining and Catherine Marsh, this at least was a possibility but, as we are to read later in Catherine Marsh's own story this did not take away the sense of loss occasioned by remaining single all her life.

Hillyer contends that 'parsonage daughters probably had more chances to marry than many other women'<sup>270</sup>, and, indeed, one might imagine that even if deprived of some of the social possibilities such as balls and theatre visits (not all clergy families did observe such restrictions), nevertheless, a progression of curates and visiting clergy might provide opportunities for the formation of friendships and cordial relationships of a more sustained nature than simply being asked to dance. Given some research by W J Reader it might be more appropriate to suggest that such daughters 'had more chance to marry clergy than other women'. In his study of the profession of fathers and fathers-in-law of clergy between 1820 and the end of the century his figures are as follows<sup>271</sup>:

	1820	1840	1860	1880-99
Wife's father's profession - clergyman	13/39	14/38	12/25	11/20
Parson's father's profession-clergyman	23/56	19/51	13/33	16/26

This would seem to indicate that in almost half of all couples in the survey, the wife was a clergy daughter. Similarly it indicates that 42% of clergy sons in the survey followed in their fathers' clerical footsteps.<sup>272</sup>

While there is much evidence to say that clergy daughters were valued by their father's in their dutiful role, as unpaid curates, as amanuenses, there are also cases where the inescapable situation of the daughter, particularly a clever daughter might be deemed an

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<sup>270</sup> Ruth Hillyer (1971) The Parson's Wife in History (in the field of social history) MPhil thesis, King's College, London 1970/1 p 200



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embarrassment. From Matilda Betham and Catherine Cappe's parents' fears of too much learning to Mary Richardson and Catharine Tait's fathers' reluctance to relinquish their daughters who had provided so much comfort and company, there were also those such as the father of Mary Sheepshanks who could not relate to his daughter because 'she was neither a promising son nor a beautiful daughter'.<sup>273</sup> This was the more poignant because of Mary's admiration of him:

Listening to her father's accounts of (such) experiences was one of the most formative and positive elements in Mary's childhood, ... but the pity was that although her father was the most significant member of the family for Mary, Mary did not matter very much to him.<sup>274</sup>

Not only did she suffer because she was neither a boy nor beautiful but also because she was the eldest of seventeen children (four of whom died in infancy) with parents who did not believe in their children having a good time. It is of little wonder that she sought her happiness outside the home and her fulfilment in social and political reform with a tenacity born of her need to constantly fight her corner for any bit of attention or 'psychic space'.

Whatever their motivation, the contribution of daughters and sons of the clergy, as has been acknowledged, to the life of service within the Empire, to philanthropy and general social care and pastoral concern has been considerable. The opening of all my research into clergy daughters was through a biographical dictionary. It amazed me how many of these celebrated women, over three centuries, had this one thing in common. Among them were actresses, singers, writers, painters, academics, social scientists but also explorers, missionaries and even a captain in the Serbian army. Of none of these could one say, 'Not so much wasted as unused'.

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<sup>272</sup> W J Reader (1966) Professional Men. p 211

<sup>273</sup> Sybil Oldfield (1984) Spinsters of this Parish p 6

<sup>274</sup> Sybil Oldfield (1984) Spinsters of this Parish

## 6. Living pages: an examination of the clergy family in literature

...I want to appeal to historians to treat literature seriously.<sup>275</sup>

In an historical thesis, it is reasonable, initially, to ask whether works of fiction can have any place at all, historical research being after all about facts, events, lives, their presentation and their analysis. I would contend however, that fiction can and does play a vital part in our understanding of history and therefore, in this thesis, but, with a firm acknowledgement that fiction must be identified as such and not masquerade, as it so easily might, as an easy alternative to research into primary material. Rosalie Colie, in her essay in a collection on interdisciplinary contributions to literary study, argues that:

literary texts offer important and sometimes unique kinds of historical evidence, and ...., by and large, the historical discipline has been curiously diffident about exploiting this evidence with rigour and confidence.<sup>276</sup>

I would agree that it is a relatively under-used source, that it must be used with great care, but I would have to state also, that, in the area that I am particularly researching, that of images and perceptions, literary evidence has a very valid and important role.

In the general sense, its usefulness within historical research is as a provider of background, a more detailed filling in of the day-to-day, the lifestyle, the setting for a portrait of women in a time, a place and a situation. Used in conjunction with diaries and contemporary biographies, fiction does help to present a more detailed picture of middle class life, its requirements, its constraints and its opportunities. Contemporary novelists of the nineteenth century were writing for a public probably not so very different in background from their characters. However, there are limits to this, for much fiction writing of the period in question was concerned with plot, with manners and with emotions. What fiction does, is allow its characters to give voice to different expressions of feeling than might emerge in a diary, and certainly a memoir or biography of the time. Women in fiction may rail at the structure of their lives, at their limitations, at their disappointments. Reading the diaries of real women, one is aware sometimes of an unwillingness to complain, a sense of disloyalty at any suggestion of dissatisfaction.

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<sup>275</sup> Rosalie Colie (1967) in Relations of Literary Study: Essays on Inter-disciplinary Contributions. James Thorpe (ed) p 95

In a bourgeois world – that of the readers and of the subjects of much fiction – the day to day was taken for granted. If it was common to all, the way society ran, the requirements of visits and calls, the etiquette of social interaction, the engagement with other areas of society – visiting parishioners, estate workers, workhouse and hospital inmates, the questions of household management and servants, writing letters, shopping, making extended visits to other relatives, then what was the interest in mentioning it, except in passing? This was what people did, whether they were resident in a rectory, a manor house or a tall town house and detail would only be interesting if it were extraordinary. For the historian, however, it is the everyday and the mundane which is of interest and provides the backdrop against which the dramas of life can be played and the significant social changes thrown into sharp relief. The absence of drama does not render invalid the backdrop.

Using literature, one is able to compare a description of the working day in a 'real' vicarage: 'besides all the visiting, parish and social, there was the Mothers' Union, the girl's Sunday School, and the old people for the weekly Bible readings. She put girls through their paces before getting them situations as domestic servants' – (the 'daily round and common task' of Georgiana Thompson, wife of an East Anglian vicar <sup>277</sup>) with the catalogue of daily tasks of the Clergyman's Daughter in George Orwell's novel of the same name:

*7 oc HC*

*Mrs T baby? Must visit*

*Breakfast. Bacon. Must ask father money*

*Ask Ellen what stuff kitchen father's tonic NB to ask about stuff for curtains at Solepipe's.*

*Visiting call on Mrs P cutting from Daily M angelica tea good for rheumatism*

*Mrs L's cornplaster*

*12 oc Rehearsal Charles I NB to order ½ lb glue 1 pot aluminium paint*

*~~Dinner~~ Luncheon*

*Take round Parish Mag NB Mrs F owes 3/6d*

*4.30 Mothers' U tea don't forget 2 ½ yds casement cloth*

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<sup>276</sup> *ibid* p 95

<sup>277</sup> Dorothy Thompson (1969) Sophia's Son p 92

*Flowers for church NB 1 tin Brasso*

*Supper. Scrambled eggs*

*Type father's sermon what about new ribbon typewriter?*

*NB to fork between peas, bindweed awful.*<sup>278</sup>

It is this detail, which illuminates fiction and which over-stretched auto biographers might not have included, which is so valuable for the reader. It might be an exaggeration, but only in the manner of a composite photograph, rather than a set of separate images.

This same clergy daughter re-adjusting bandages on 'bad legs' has her real life counterpart in Louise Creighton's Memoir, when she recalls that 'there fell into my hands a little book giving directions how to treat ulcerated legs, with an account of what a lady had done in this way in some south country parish',<sup>279</sup> and proceeds to tell of her attempts to carry out the treatment.

When making a comparison between factual accounts and fiction, there is often, in the former, the absence of the narrative voice. This appears in biography but rarely in a diary or journal and even the biographer may not be sufficiently detached to be able to relate a set of events in a totally objective manner. Yet contemporary biographies or autobiographical writings often establish a set of characters very much as does the fiction writer. Sometimes these main players within a person's life hold centre-stage throughout. Other writers attempt to reduce the number of different people into categories, or attribute them with themed chapters rather than maintaining them as minor and sometimes inconsistent threads throughout, understanding, after all, that it is as difficult for the reader of any book, be it fiction or non-fiction, to keep track of too many small though contributory elements.

There is also a form of writing which falls between the fiction and the fact. There is some evidence for the use of supposed fiction (often with no author named) being produced to make a factual and sometimes unpopular point to the reading public. The Curate's Wife<sup>280</sup> published in 1860, tells a poignant story of clergy poverty centred around a curate's family in a state of extreme hardship. It is a good story. It engages the reader

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<sup>278</sup> George Orwell (1990) *A Clergyman's Daughter* (first published 1935). p 3

<sup>279</sup> Louise Creighton (1994) *Memoir of a Victorian Woman: reflections of Louise Creighton 1850-1936*. p 63

<sup>280</sup> Anon (1860) *The Curate's Wife*.

and appears in the tiny format of such popular writing of the time. Its main characters are the wife of the curate and a benevolent woman who befriends the family and extricates them from their desperate circumstances. Within this story the whole difficulty of clergy poverty is set out (see chapter 'Considering the Lilies') but it also addresses the major problems of pride and expectation. The curate is adamant that his wife may not seek employment herself... that would be too demeaning, 'the cure is worse than the disease':

But oh, Lettice, that my father's son should be brought to this!  
And Mr Winthrop laid his head on the table and groaned.<sup>281</sup>

After his wife offers in vain to sell a scarf she has been given and suggests the only way out is to put an advertisement in a newspaper seeking help, she explodes in frustrated anger '... it is not begging! It is that God's ministers are ill-paid, that they are poverty stricken, starving.' At the same time his children may not all attend church on Christmas morning because they have insufficient coats between them and much of their clothing is too shabby to appear in public. It is only through the intervention of a perceptive outsider that this vicious circle of pride and perceived expectation is broken.

Another book in a similar vein is Owlet of Owlstone Edge – written in 1856 by the Rev. F E Paget as an apologia for the clergy wife. This series of essays is told as by an owl eavesdropping from the chimney pot on various parsonages and identifying each parson's wife with totally different characteristics. At the beginning, he makes it quite clear that he is describing a very worthy category of women;

...there is not a class of persons in this country, which do a tithe of the good they do. I believe that not a year passes but 2 or 3 score of parsons' wives are brought to their graves, fairly worn out by work to which they were have devoted themselves. Many a martyr of whom the world has not heard, will come from their ranks.<sup>282</sup>

As he unfolds each of these cameos of women too diligent, too worldly, too shallow, or too depressing, he also reflects upon their husbands, their relationships with each other, their expectations and most particularly on their relationships within the parish and their financial position. He does therefore, seem to be the bearer of a number of messages

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<sup>281</sup> Anon (1860) The Curate's Wife p 57

<sup>282</sup> F E Paget, (1856) The Owlet of Owlstone Edge: his travels, his experiences and his lucubrations. p28

and he cites, for authority once again, George Herbert. What is remarkable about this author is that he has absolutely no doubts to the value and usefulness of wives for the better carrying out of the clerical function, and 'the great advantage of a wife ....she would save him time for reading which would otherwise be lost in making tea or pouring it out.'<sup>283</sup> More seriously he writes about clergy poverty, speaking of the 'poor curate whose poverty was a great crime' and 'how is a poor parson to win the respect of his purse-proud parishioners?'<sup>284</sup> which chimes well with other non-fictional writing (see also chapter 'Considering the Lilies') indicating that this is indeed a sore and sensitive subject which can be more safely set out through the medium of fiction.

Similar in some ways, is fiction written by members of clergy families which is either overtly or more subtly autobiographical, where fictional characters within the plot are given circumstances in which they can voice some of the strong feelings of the author. Noel Streatfeild wrote in the 1950s about her own childhood in The Vicarage Family and later Away from the Vicarage describing vicarage life at the end of the century. Though both books are totally autobiographical, she feels it necessary to write in the third person and to give 'her' character a fictitious name. In this format she is able to criticise, to evaluate and to expose feelings which she might have found unacceptable to have published as her own, even at the much later time that she was writing. She is well aware of all the influences of duty and loyalty and can agonise about the conflicts these brought about in her life. She is objective but she is not cruel. And she is, in this medium, more free than women writing directly of their experiences.

Different from this again is a novel such as Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh in which he, a son of the vicarage and with a very unhappy childhood to build upon, seeks to set out his anger and distaste at the church, the hypocrisy of some of its clergy and of his own intense unhappiness and ill-feeling for his parents. Butler began the novel after his mother's death, but it was not finished to his satisfaction or published till thirty years later after his own death. If his portrayal of the Pontifex family presents an image of nineteenth century clergy then it is indeed a chilling picture and if this is a novel with a purpose then one must take it as a cathartic attempt to shake off a savage and

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<sup>283</sup> F E Paget, (1856) The Owlet of Owlestone Edge: his travels, his experiences and his lucubrations p 118

<sup>284</sup> FE Paget (1856) Owlet of Owlestone Edge p 73

repressive upbringing, to cast a grim depiction of Christian charity, of emotional blackmail and loveless parenting.

I submit it as the result of my own poor observation, that a good deal of unkindness and selfishness on the part of parents towards children is not generally followed by ill consequences to the parents themselves. They may cast a gloom over their children's lives for many years without having to suffer anything that will hurt them. I should say, then, that it shows no great moral obliquity on the part of parents if within certain limits they make their children's lives a burden to them.<sup>285</sup>

However, clergy families in fiction have no requirement to be good, kind, worthy or philanthropic. That is the expectation of the real world, and does not have to be that of the fiction writer. The choice to set a novel in a clerical home or community was enticing in a period when the church and its clergy formed an essential part of rural society. But while there are frequent mentions of clergy and their families within the writings of that most celebrated of clergy daughters, Jane Austen, they appear far more as subsidiary characters than as the main elements in her stories. She knew, and could tell much, of the difficulties inherent in patronage, in the need for a young man in orders to find himself beneficed before being in a position to actually have a wife. It is only in Mansfield Park that the existing and potential inhabitants of the parsonage assume a major role. Pressure was put on her by the Rev. James Stanier, Librarian to the Prince Regent, to 'devote one of her excellent novels to depicting the character and lifestyle of an English clergyman of the day'<sup>286</sup>. Because of the manner of his request, or for whatever other reason, Jane Austen demurred, declaring herself unequal to the task of representing suitably someone who would need to be so much her intellectual superior. So her clerical characters and their wives remain silly or overly serious, pompous, ambitious or muddle-headed and we rejoice in the richness of her descriptions more than anything but an incidental description of life in the Rectory or Vicarage.

Less renowned contemporary writers did set their novels within a clerical environment but the clerical aspect is entirely ignored. So Mary Gylls' The Parsonage and the Park (1863) and Helen and her Cousins, or Two months at Ashfield Rectory (1867) tell much of the same social circumstances as those of Austen, visits and neighbours, though with

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<sup>285</sup> Samuel Butler (1903) (1986) The Way of all Flesh p 112

<sup>286</sup> Irene Collins (1994) Jane Austen and the Clergy. p 1

a slightly moral message, but the clerical setting is irrelevant and could be replaced by any lesser gentry family and with none of the 'bite' or brilliant character building and observation of the daughter of the Rev George Austen , Rector of Steventon.

Anthony Trollope, not a son of clerical parents, chose to site the majority of his novels within a clerical landscape. It is understandable for it provides a fruitful setting. Within the confines of the parish, or more especially the cathedral close, can be found an hierarchical structure, issues of preferment, of personality, of theology and of practice which did and can continue to figure among the clergy and their families. He also introduces a rich vein of female characters, prime among which must be the redoubtable Mrs Proudie. It is remarked in Margaret Watt's book on The Clergy Wife in History that Mrs Proudie is probably the most celebrated clergy wife – she was a contemporary of Mrs Tait, the wife of the then Archbishop of Canterbury and certainly, nowadays at least, better known. Both women are 'real' in different senses. Mrs Proudie was the embodiment of a type of woman who exists and existed both within and without the church, one who was able to be drawn, often in cruel detail because of her anonymity, but we all know people who have her touch. To have written about a character such as Mrs Tait in a novel would have been less entertaining because apparently consistent goodness is hard to maintain in characters unless there are some around to give light and shade to them. Readers would probably have wanted to search for some blemish to make her more real and yet it is not she who is the fictional character.

It is not always the case that 'real' women lead more ordinary lives than their fictional counterparts. Certainly the three main women in this study led, at some point, very remarkable lives and their stories – the romantic courtship of the Taits, Catharine Tait's desperately poignant account of the death of her five daughters, Catherine Marsh's single-handed confrontation with angry navvies, or drunks, or convicts, Henrietta Barnett's taking on of the male establishment to bring about her Utopian village or her life in the depth of one of the poorest and most dangerous parts of London, take one many miles from the 'ordinary'. It is writers like Margaret Oliphant who can describe the small world of the country curate and his family, the visiting of the poor, the dispensing of medicines, the desperation at the state and condition of housing for the rural poor. We are made aware also of the lingering power of patronage, of unfair preferment and absentee vicars, of a clergy whose status continued to diminish throughout the century



but whose own self-expectations and those for his family did not reduce accordingly. In The Curate in Charge (1875), the Reverend St John, recently widowed for a second time, calls home his two older daughters:

Mr St John felt that it was quite natural his girls should come home and keep his house for him, and take the trouble of the little boys, and visit the schools – so naturally that when he had said ‘Now you are here again,’ it seemed to him that everything was said that needed to be said.<sup>287</sup>

Oliphant portrays the frustration and monotony for lively young women, growing up within the confines of a country parish, where there are no expectations beyond that which has been the case before. One cannot but ally this fictional but truthful sounding situation with that which befell Nellie Benson, daughter of Edward and Minnie Benson when he was called to be Archbishop of Canterbury and her happy Oxford days were suddenly ended:

Too much was asked of daughters in Victorian days. When the move was made from Truro to Lambeth Nellie was recalled from LMH since it was felt that there must be a daughter at home.<sup>288</sup>

In her Carlingford novels, Oliphant illuminates the day to day life of dissenting and Anglican clergy families. In some of these there is more ‘drama’ but in them all there is a vibrant image of local church politics, of small town life albeit with a romantic thread. There are other serious issues that emerge in her novels – among them the role of single women and the lack of clergy pensions or provision for widows. Herself a widow whose writing helped maintain not only her own children but other members of her family, she harnessed both the usefulness of her own gift and her opportunities to make a point to her readership. In one of the Chronicles of Carlingford she also touches on an issue that has its parallel in other life stories in this study, that of the contest of loyalty and attraction between life for a man in orders in the academic ivory towers and that of a rectory in a parish full of real and needy people as opposed to bachelor clerics (see chapter ‘Rectory Culture’). In The Rector, the Rev Morley Procter ventures into a parish from the safety and seclusion of All Souls College only to find himself, when faced with the need to minister to a dying parishioner, totally unprepared and wanting in all the necessary skills and sensitivities required of a parish priest. He decides to return to his

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<sup>287</sup> Margaret Oliphant (1875) (1987) The Curate in Charge p 53

college and is met with the dismay of his mother: 'My dear, your poor father and I trained you up to be a clergyman... and not to be a Fellow of All Souls.'<sup>289</sup> She continues in her attempt to persuade him not to abandon his post:

And with an excellent hard-working curate.... and still more my son – with a good wife, Morley; a wife who would enter into all the parish work, and give you useful hints, and conduct herself as a clergyman's wife should – with such a wife—'

'Lucy Woodhouse' cried the Rector, starting to his feet and forgetting all his proprieties; 'I tell you the thing is impossible. I'll go back to All Souls'<sup>290</sup>

It is clear from this short story, that the unpreparedness and lack of training for parish work afforded men in orders through the university life was observed by those on the outside. It was, as we have noted, clear to enlightened clergy such as Wilberforce, thus encouraging him to set up a training college at Cuddesdon.

Another demonstration of the life of the dutiful clergy daughter is found in Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South in which Margaret Hale is the daughter at home, but she does not suffer the frustration of Oliphant's St John girls in wishing for something more exciting..

This life.... realised all Margaret's anticipations. She took pride in her forest. Its people were her people. She made hearty friends with them: nursed their babies, talked or read with slow distinctness to their old people, carried dainty messes to the sick,; resolved before long to teach at the school.<sup>291</sup>

As the novel develops, her life does take on a more dramatic turn, but that is after her father has lost his faith, given up his vocation and moved to the industrial north. It then ceases to be a story of a clergy family. Another of Gaskell's novels, Ruth is set in the Manse but its principle concern is with the hypocrisy which governs the lives and thoughts of a community when faced with a woman's reputation and her life subsequent to her 'fall'. It addresses these issues and allows the Parson and his sister to demonstrate Christian compassion against the strong forces of respectability and virtue. The theme of loss of faith is addressed most significantly in Mrs Humphrey Ward's

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<sup>288</sup> Betty Askwith (1971) Two Victorian Families p 177

<sup>289</sup> Margaret Oliphant (1986) (first published 1863) Chronicles of Carlingford. p 32

<sup>290</sup> Margaret Oliphant (1986) (first published 1863) Chronicles of Carlingford. p 33

Robert Elsmere. In this lengthy novel, the dutiful clergy daughter of an evangelical parson becomes, herself, a clergy wife after much deliberation about the conflicting duty of daughter versus wife. Having been won over to marry Robert Elsmere, in what is undoubtedly a love match, the role of clergy wife to which she is eminently suited through her own 'framing and fashioning' becomes flawed with doubt and anxiety – not because of any difficulties with her own faith, but in her need to acknowledge her husband's complete turning away from the established church and the interpretation of his own route to salvation. It is a novel of great pain and heartsearching, and within it are passages which mirror real-life situations and do not venture down any path of easy solutions or happy endings.

This novel had considerable impact at a time when doubt and disbelief were very current issues. It was a 'novel with a purpose' and had a similar impact to another such novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. Whereas Harriet Beecher Stowe's purpose was concerned with racism and social justice, Ward's concern comes out of her background in the hothouse of Oxford theology and religious debate, and she is keen to use Catherine, her puritanical heroine, as a spokeswoman for her cause, just as her husband is set to represent the aspects of social concern, of liberalism and the immense difficulties inherent in attempting to marry scientific discovery with fundamentalist Christianity.

While such books do tackle serious issues of faith and commitment, there are many other fictional portrayals of the clergy, their families and surroundings which are more descriptive and suggest a view of, particularly, rural clergy that is very persuasive. One can read into this verse from the beginning of the period, The Vicar, a view of 'how it used to be':

Some years ago ere time and taste  
Had turned our parish topsy-turvy  
When Darnel Park was Darnel Waste  
And roads as little known as scurvy  
The man who lost his way between  
St Mary's Hill and Dandy Thicket  
Was always shown across the green  
And guided to the Parson's wicket.

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<sup>291</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell (1855) (1955) North and South. p 16

Back flew the bolt of lissom lath;  
Fair Margaret, in her tidy kirtle  
Led the lorn traveller up the path  
Through clean-clipt rows of bow and myrtle;  
And Dun and Sacho, Tramp and Troy  
Upon the parlour steps collected,  
Wagged all their tails, and seemed to say –  
Our master knows you – you're expected.

Uprise the Reverend Dr Brown  
Uprise the Doctor's winsome narrow;  
The lady laid her knitting down,  
Her husband clasped his ponderous Barrow;  
What'er the stranger's caste or creed,  
Pundit or Papist, saint or sinner,  
He found a stable for his steed  
And welcome for himself, and dinner.<sup>292</sup>

Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802-39)

If this highly sentimentalised image fails to conjure up the reality, it remains part of the canon of literary images, giving an aura of industry, virtue and ecumenical hospitality which would surely have been desirable and lived up to, at least in part, by many country clergy. A natural progression would be to move on to Richard Jeffries' portrayal of rural life in Hodge and his Masters where what appears to the observer to be a similar rural idyll of the 1870s, is then given the perspective of the clergy wife and a flavour of the disenchantment and alienation of the rural parish that we have lighted upon in the introductory chapter on Church History:

But the work, the parish, the people, all seemed to have slipped out of her husband's hands... But surely his good intentions, his way of life, his gentle kindness should carry sway. Instead of which the parish seemed to have quite left the Church, and the parson was outside the real modern life of the village.<sup>293</sup>

These are, however, more gentle and sensitive portrayals of the clergy than the image of more celebrated authors as seen in Thackeray's depiction of the Rev and Mrs Bute Crawley in Vanity Fair:

Mrs Crawley, the rector's wife, was a stout little body, who wrote this worthy divine's sermons. Being of a domestic turn, and keeping the house a great deal with her daughters, she ruled

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<sup>292</sup> F E Christmas (1950) The Parson in English Literature, p 149

<sup>293</sup> Richard Jeffries (1946) Hodge and his Master p 269

absolutely within the Rectory, wisely giving her husband full liberty without.<sup>294</sup>

And if Thackeray, at the earlier part of the period, could cast an image of an efficient but managing woman directing a spendthrift and slightly irresponsible clergyman husband:

She had always been a prudent and thrifty wife to him. In spite of her care he was always in debt. It had taken him ten years to pay off his college bills...<sup>295</sup>

Several decades later, Charles Dickens (who really does not number many clergy among his multitudinous characters) continues this portrayal of the unworldly cleric directed by a woman with firm control of the purse-strings:

Mr Cladband is a large yellow man, with a fat smile, and a general appearance of having a good deal of travail in his system. Mrs Cladband is a stern, severe-looking, silent woman .... and while Mr C glows with humility and travail, Mrs C pays the money.<sup>296</sup>

Management of money is an issue that does arise frequently in factual writing, both in the ineffectual and extravagant use of money by some clergy wives who had, in their defence, probably no experience in financial management or had grown up in households where money was more plentiful, and in the immensely efficient handling of accounts by others. While some women plunged their husbands into debt, others were adept at rescuing them from it or at least maintaining a happily managed domestic economy.

However, it is not within the works of all writers to paint such managing images of clergy wives nor such negative images of their husbands. Anne Bronte, herself a clergy daughter, could put a more positive spin on the clergy marriage as in her description in Agnes Grey:

She went to bury herself in a lovely village parsonage among the hills, and yet in spite of all this, and in spite of my mother's high spirits and my father's whims, I believe you might search all England thoroughly and fail to find a happier couple.

From Sinclair Lewis's satirical look at evangelical religion in Elmer Gantry, there emerges this portrait of a happy if short marriage and a rare portrayal of a joyful and romantic

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<sup>294</sup> William Thackeray (1848) Vanity Fair.. p 72

<sup>295</sup> William Thackeray (1848) Vanity Fair. p 73

attachment which no doubt was often the case but could rarely be expressed in truth and quite rarely even in fiction:

He was married at 30 to a passionate singing girl with kind lips. He loved her so romantically – just to touch the crazy quilt about her was poetry, and her cowhide shoes were to him fairy slippers – he loved her so ungrudgingly that when she died, in childbirth, within a year after their marriage, he had nothing left for any woman. He lived alone with his undiminished vision of her. Not the most scaddudgering Mother in Zion had ever hinted that Mr Pengilly looked damply upon the widows in his fold.<sup>297</sup>

It is comforting to find a diversity of perception and to be able to move to an image that is neither hectoring and domineering, pale and virtuous, careworn and declining, conjuring up a vision of a clergy wife in a warm, sensual and loving relationship. We know nothing of Mrs Pengilly's ability to manage a household, keep accounts or even teach in Sunday School, but at least we have a positive image with which to conclude this chapter and to confirm that both within the literary and the 'true' image of the clergy wife there was room for love and affection and that these elements were crucial to the maintenance of an effectual man of God at the vicarage.

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<sup>296</sup> Charles Dickens (1853) Bleak House.

<sup>297</sup> Sinclair Lewis (1983) Elmer Gantry

### Part III Biographies

#### 1. 'Sour sisters and Sunday Schools': Catherine Marsh, a clergy daughter (1818-1912)

'Could you bear sixty years of sour sisters and Sunday Schools?'<sup>298</sup>

This was the bitter question of Caroline Maitland, a close life-long friend of Catherine Marsh and herself a spinster. It was a cry against the loneliness of the single woman, the expectations of the dutiful daughter and the image of dullness and long suffering good works which might seem to be the lot of the women in a clergy family. Caroline was not herself a clergy daughter but Catherine was, indeed, the youngest child of the Reverend William Marsh (1776-1864), all of whose three other daughters and only son married and had children. She did remain the 'daughter at home', living and working with her father for the remainder of his life. But this would be where the similarity might end, for these words do not describe the image of a life so extraordinary that it has been much chronicled, while her sisters pass into the oblivion of history.

One of my major sources for this study has been the biography of Catherine Marsh written by her niece Lucy O'Rorke. Lucy was in reality more an adopted daughter than a niece, her mother having died when she was a child and Catherine having taken on several of the seven children at various times to care for them. In return, Lucy, married in the family pattern to a clergyman, offered her home to her aunt in her last years. These were very loving and caring relationships. The difficulty is that Lucy's view and portrayal of her aunt is not the stuff of objectivity. She loved her aunt and at her death would have found it inappropriate to chronicle her life, the life after all of a very well known and respected woman, in anything but a positive, not to say eulogising manner. The other major source of biographical material is Catherine's own biography of her father, not written immediately at his death because other things intervened and the care of the living took precedence over the commemoration of the dead. So explains an introductory passage

The publication of this book has been delayed beyond the time proposed, by the difficulty of attending to its preparation during the four months prevalence of cholera, last year; when an

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<sup>298</sup> Catherine Maitland quoted in Lucy O'Rorke (1929) ed Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 85'

opportunity of attending on some of the sufferers appeared to be my duty for the time being.<sup>299</sup>

Catherine had, by this time (1867), already written a very successful biography and had been applauded by one critic for her ability not to fall into the trap of too much eulogy. Her Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars had evinced the following from the Rev Sir Henry Dukinfield, Rector of St Martin’s in the Fields:

I am not fond of religious biographies, they are apt to be exaggerated and full of indifferent theology and mawkish sentimentality, and there is so often a want of reality about them, whereas in your book Hedley Vicars stands out as a most real man, a wonderful and loveable Christian.<sup>300</sup>

What Sir Henry says is true of many biographies, memoirs and memorials, not all of them religious. As we will read later, Catherine was heeding the advice of friends given when she was writing her first biography, that she should allow the person’s life to speak for itself without too much fulsome comment. It is not an easy task, as I have discovered in writing these biographical chapters, for one does tend to become seduced by the subjects of one’s writing. Lytton Strachey, in the preface to Eminent Victorians, writes of it being ‘as difficult to write a good life as to live one’<sup>301</sup>. He condemns the majority of contemporary (in 1918) biographies for ‘(containing) ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design.’<sup>302</sup>

Her biography of her father is, nevertheless, fairly fulsome and does, as is a feature of religious biography, devote a considerable amount of importance to his death. Death narratives are so much part of Victorian writing that it would be unusual not to include one in a biography of someone of strong faith who died at home surrounded by his family and who had a ‘good death’. There is more to the death narrative than simply the telling of the last days and hours of the subject, for it is the nature of belief in the afterlife that is so important and which also provides a consolatory element to the event. Catherine Marsh mirrors much of her feelings and faith in the way she describes the life

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<sup>299</sup> Catherine Marsh (1867) Life of William Marsh p vi

<sup>300</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 128

<sup>301</sup> Lytton Strachey (1918) (1993) Eminent Victorians

<sup>302</sup> Lytton Strachey 1918 (1993) Eminent Victorians.



and death of others. Because she was an evangelical, and therefore bound to seek salvation and acknowledgement of a relationship with Christ for all those who might be about to come face to face with Him, there is a sense in which she is always looking to the ‘good death’ as a happy ending no matter how wretched or unhappy the person. So, for her, in the cholera wards, there is an acceptance that if the body cannot be healed then the soul at least must be saved. Catherine Marsh herself, in her book Death and Life: a record of the cholera wards in the London Hospital describes the hospital as being ‘like a battle-field, strewn with the wounded and the dying, where the youngest soldier, equally with the oldest, was “a hero in the fight”<sup>303</sup>. This fight was presumably with the disease but it could also be seen to be with the devil for the possession of the departing soul.

It is important, in looking at the sources available and used in such a study, to consider who might have been the intended audience for any of the source material, and what would have been its purpose. It is clear that Catherine’s account of her father’s life would have been something she wanted to do to commemorate a man she loved and had lived with all her life. He had had three wives and had outlived two of them but Catherine was able to chronicle all this very fairly and objectively, having established good relations with both her stepmothers. The book would have been for his contemporaries, for his family, the many men with whom he had shared the service of God in the role of priest and curate, his parishioners and those whose life he had touched through his campaigning or his preaching. In addition, as was the case with more of her books, it was as an exemplary account, a life to follow, to emulate.

Exemplary literature was immensely popular (see chapter ‘Very Great Expectations’. It provided role models for ordinary people. It is hardly surprising if there grew up eventually a fascination with the anti-hero, for all around the reading public were texts, admonitions and ‘lives’ full of holy sentiment and good deeds. The dark streets of the cities and ports, teeming with vice and poverty, may have incensed the clergy, the social reformer and the philanthropist and inspired them to great efforts to make a difference and change this part of the social fabric, but this darker side to every industrial centre, this shadow on the edge of every fount of wealth and power inspired, even as it

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<sup>303</sup> Catherine Marsh (1867) Death and Life: a record of the cholera wards in the London Hospital

frightened. It was therefore, necessary in the eyes of those concerned with the moral and spiritual well-being of the populace, for them to have someone worthwhile to admire, to look up to, to copy. Novels brought exciting situations, romantic outcomes, danger and uncertainty. The heroes and heroines of these might excite and inspire but they were not always good role models. Much better examples were to be found in the lives of more accessible, less dramatic people. This was what Catherine Marsh did well. She could describe ordinary lives and make the simple virtues of patience, loyalty, personal courage and humility shine out of the work-a-day lives of navvies or farm labourers. Her heroes were men who thought about their own limitations alongside the limitless grace of a loving God and were spurred on to greater patience or endeavour by such grace and the example of Christ.

What is evident alongside all her exemplary themes and tales, true though they were, was that she too, in her own lifetime was also a significant role model. A whole chapter is devoted to her in such improving books as Famous Girls who have become Illustrious Women (1880) by J. M. Darton and in Lizzie Alldridge's The World's Workers (n/d).

While these might seem to be aimed at a youthful readership, there is also other contemporary and more specialised writing about Catherine Marsh to draw upon. Jerusha Richardson, in Women of the Church of England includes her in the chapter entitled 'Sisterhoods and Parochial Workers' alongside Louise Creighton, Florence Nightingale and Harriet Monsall, but acknowledges that she might also be afforded a place in the chapter on 'Women in literature': 'Catherine's useful, busy early life as a clergy daughter at Birmingham and Leamington has been overshadowed by her later evangelistic efforts of voice and pen'.<sup>304</sup> The chapter goes on to compare her with other prominent women of her day (notably Catherine Stanley and Catherine Gladstone) and to say that: '(she) may in one aspect of her life work be counted as a literary woman; she was certainly a revivalist, but she was also a clergywoman and parish worker'.<sup>305</sup>

None of the contemporary sources is as extensive or as full as her niece's account, but, as a well-known figure, she is accorded a mention in works dealing with social and evangelistic endeavours as well in her role as a biographer and author of tracts, and, by the time she reached middle age, she had carved herself sufficient of a name to figure in

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<sup>304</sup> Jerusha Richardson (1907) Women of the Church of England pp 265/7

a number of contemporary biographical works and directories. These all acknowledge that she is her father's daughter and that she is the author of a number of books. The literary credits appear not just in the expected Allibone A Critical Dictionary of English Literature<sup>306</sup> but also in the more general Men and Women of our Time<sup>307</sup>, Women of the Day<sup>308</sup> and even in Ward's Men of the Reign of Queen Victoria.<sup>309</sup> In this latter she is described as having 'taken the greatest interest in the improvement of the working classes for whom she has written narratives of a religious character'. In this biographical entry therefore, there is an acknowledgement of the link between the writer and the philanthropist and also a recognition of the presumed audience for her writing. In several of these entries mention is made of her residence in Beckenham and her relationship to its rector (her brother-in-law). This may be because, although she lived in a number of places, it is with Beckenham she is principally associated but it also positions her as part of the rectory family - a clergy sister-in-law as well as a clergy daughter.

The other aspect of her life which figures in these entries is her work amongst the cholera sufferers in the 1866 epidemic in London and her establishment of a convalescent home and an orphanage for its victims. Her work specifically with the navvies is not mentioned, simply 'the working classes' although it is her work with them which was her *cause célèbre* and the subject of her most famous book English Hearts and English Hands (1858). It is unlikely, in any of these contexts, that anything other than positive or affectionate comments would be made. The only other primary source has to be her correspondence and that was extensive and shows up in the letter collections of the many august men of her time with whom she corresponded, among them Gladstone, Archbishop Tait and Shaftesbury.

The other major source I have used has been Catherine's own writing, for within this one learns much of her attitudes and her sensitivities to the problems of the people whose champion she became. She was a pioneer for the recognition and respect due to 'the working men of England'. Her accounts of their lives and their difficulties are written with great respect and sympathy. They are however, predominantly case studies and are

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<sup>305</sup> Jerusha Richardson (1907) Women of the Church of England

<sup>306</sup> S A Allibone (1859-71) A Critical Dictionary of English Literature

<sup>307</sup> Men and Women of our Time (1899)

<sup>308</sup> F Hays (1885) Women of the Day

concerned with the response of (mostly) men within a difficult or trying situation coming to terms or conquering it through evangelical inspiration, divine intervention, the example of Christian living or gospel preaching. Her own place within these salvation narratives is always chronicled as minimal though her biographer would not have it so. It is left to others to tell of instances when she was able to step in and act on behalf of men found in confrontational situations. These are many and indeed very dramatic: instances of her intervening between a crowd of navvies and defensive and nervous police, or between a desperate army deserter and the military police who had cornered him. She would seem to have been very brave and never shirked this sort of challenge though always acknowledging the need to be respectful to those bound to be forceful agents of authority. Her reasoning was that every man had his dignity and was entitled to be afforded this even when he was *in extremis* or enduring punishment or deprivation he had earned by his behaviour. To her, everyone had a soul worth saving, a better self that could be revealed and released, and even if she was unaware of the outcome of many of her interventions, there were enough 'reunions' with people many years on, to reassure her of the influence she had had over many lives.

Catherine Marsh was a clever child. She had the benefit of older children to direct her play, and the inevitable resource of an educated father with a library and individual and particular interests in causes and concerns which strayed far outside the physical boundaries of his own Essex parish. His wife, Maria, had been hard-won in a conflict of honour and pride when his father had lost his fortune and could not, therefore, bear the shame of having his son marry in reduced circumstances. On his mother's deathbed the battle was won and Maria Chowne became 'her husband's diligent helper in the parish'<sup>310</sup> Thereafter we are told that 'love reigned in the home'<sup>311</sup> and that Catherine enjoyed a happy childhood, 'in an atmosphere of benevolence and good and useful work, not bounded by the narrow limits of the parish.'<sup>312</sup> (see figure 2). William and Maria Marsh did set limits on their children however. Dances and theatres were forbidden and parental authority was maintained. There was a firm regime of prayer and Bible reading. Stories came from the Bible and from pamphlets from the missionary societies. This

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<sup>309</sup> T H Ward (1885) Men of the Reign of Queen Victoria

<sup>310</sup> Jerusha Richardson (1907) Women of the Church of England p 4

<sup>311</sup> *ibid*

<sup>312</sup> *ibid*

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was fertile enough ground for Catherine to develop a ‘power of vivid narration to delight other children’<sup>313</sup> By the age of twelve she had already submitted her first manuscript to a publisher (and had it rejected).

## **Figure 2. The family of the Rev. William Marsh**

Nor was Catherine’s early life confined in a geographical sense. The climate in Colchester was bad for her father’s health and the family removed to Guernsey where he eventually recovered. He was then offered a living in ‘one of the new churches in Birmingham’ and since there was no suitable vicarage he took a house at Edgbaston and walked the distance between. Life was in many ways hard. He found the inner city congregation a great contrast to his previous Essex parish. He had to battle with an unkempt and lawless gathering with little interest or concern for the liturgy or expectations of the Church of England. According to Allibone’s biographical entry in 1859, he soon reversed all these negative trends but at some cost, once again, in terms

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313 Lucy O’Rourke Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p4

of his health. Neither was the life of an urban vicar who was obliged to live in a country village easy or inexpensive for there was an obligation to minister to the ‘home’ village in addition to the enormous challenge of the inner city parish. The Marshes gave up their coach and horses and converted the coach house into a village school. As with many clergy the question of hospitality was a difficult one, and it was only by being thrifty and frugal in their own housekeeping that it was possible to be generous to the needy. Catherine’s mother had come ‘in the bloom of her days, when all was cheerful and pleasant around her, ... (and) took her station as the willing helpmeet of a parson’s duty in a country village’<sup>314</sup>. Having at one time been wealthy but having made a choice to marry for love, she had to take on the relative poverty of a country clergyman on £300 a year and a house.

Nor were their problems limited to financial ones for William Marsh’s ‘views’ also presented him with difficulties. His evangelical inclinations, his concern for the establishment of good relationships with the Jews and his campaigning against slavery were all contentious issues and could only stand in the way of his advancement. But no amount of external disapproval, financial constraint or familial upheaval could deter the Marsh family from the joyful and inspirational home life which was required of clergy and their families in order to be a good example to others. Catherine Marsh’s childhood home was that of a Christian family, enjoying the events of the Church’s year and the inevitable centring of the household around her father’s profession:

Sunday brought a welcome rest in Catherine Marsh’s fully occupied life. She had learnt to love it in her childhood, for her father’s Saturday good-night was ‘a good day to you tomorrow’ and Sunday morning was greeted with gladness in their house. She grew up with a great value for the services and festivals of the Church of England.<sup>315</sup>

It may be relevant at this point to consider the position of evangelicals within the Church of England at a time when the dissenters, particularly in the various manifestations of Methodism, were holding considerable sway within many communities and claiming much of the ‘spiritual high ground’ for themselves. The Church of England was steering a narrow course between concerns about ‘popery’ on the one hand (too frequent

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<sup>314</sup> Lucy O’Rorke Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 48

<sup>315</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p59

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communions, rituals, the cult of Mary and idolatrous symbols and imagery) and lay preachers, (even women preachers), non-liturgical services, meetings, cottage readings and regular parish visiting on the other. There was a residue of squirearchical influence and the continuation of patronage, particularly in the country parishes. The industrial revolution and the later depression in agriculture had brought about a migration to the towns and cities where the church existent was not always equal to the task of welcoming, ministering to and securing the commitment of the immense number of newly urban parishioners. Consequently, one can see that there were areas of insecurity and defensiveness within the social and religious establishment which might cause, at best raised eyebrows, and at worst hostility and obstruction, towards an Anglican clergyman of strong views, ‘lateral’ interests and with no immense pedigree of wealth or influence. That Catherine Marsh, and her family, remained firmly rooted within the Church of England is therefore, a matter of some significance.

In these circumstances a clergyman would be grateful for all the support and fellow feeling he could find. A neighbour, not far distant from Birmingham, was the evangelical Archdeacon Spooner of Elmdon, near Coventry. His daughter Catharine was to reappear in the life of Catherine Marsh when they were adults, in London and facing the results of a virulent outbreak of cholera in 1866. Archdeacon Spooner's daughter became the wife of Archibald Tait who, eventually became Archbishop of Canterbury. Spooner, like Marsh, remained firmly Anglican but the differences emerged through the partners of their progeny. Marsh's older daughters married clergymen, all of whom were well able to remain theologically in tune with their father-in-law, one of them even inviting the aging and twice widowed clergyman to become his curate. Spooner's daughters seem to have spread their net further and to have involved themselves with a much wider range of theological influence, from the bizarre Fortescue<sup>316</sup> preaching mortification of the flesh, to the very high church Charles Monsall,<sup>317</sup> whose widow eventually became Mother Superior of the Clewer Sisterhood. (see Tait chapter). That his youngest daughter, much influenced by both of these men, should marry a man whose name became synonymous with the Broad Church view and who was appointed to the Primacy for his ability to deal calmly and sympathetically with the whole range of Anglican

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<sup>316</sup> Edward Fortescue born 1816, vicar of Knutsford. Entered Church of Rome 1875

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interpretation, was to some extent a legacy from the rather richer and more theologically varied background of the Spooner family.

William Marsh continued to endear himself to his parishioners and to seek and find souls to be saved and bodies and minds to be nurtured and taught. It was inevitably a family affair. While his wife was not strong, she was able to have a calming and inspiring influence on her daughters. She was an accomplished and well-read woman who took on the role of the teacher, just as the older daughters became pupil teachers, passing on their own lessons to their younger siblings. It was said that Mrs Marsh took great care with the education of her children and not one departed the faith. Education, in such a family, was more than basic teaching; it was concerned with the whole person, the mind, the body, the spirit and the social conscience. The Marsh children had a happy and lively childhood, beginning each day at 7.30 with family prayers. It was clearly not all ‘sour sisters and Sunday schools’ for there were friends and energetic sports and excursions with them into the countryside. They were country children and could intersperse all the dutiful requirements of teaching and visiting with adventures and celebrations, but the rules were there and always the parental guidance. A further testimony to the victory of personality over surroundings and expectations is found in a comment in the biography from ‘one who had known her since childhood’ who remarked:

Brought up in a very narrow corner of the religious world of the 60s and 70s it would seem to me when I was young as if to be religious meant to have dowdy clothes and long faces, and to object to anything beautiful or amusing. Miss Marsh’s whole personality was in the strongest contrast to all this.<sup>318</sup>

Although education at home was their lot, Catherine travelled about visiting relatives and while in Yorkshire visited the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan Bridge which had so uncomfortably accommodated the Bronte sisters, though Catherine was to remark that it was much improved since their day. Catherine comments hardly at all on her own education, and it is to be wondered how it must have seemed to one brought up in the warmth and loving support of a clergy family, to imagine the life of other clergy daughters educated in the sparse and cold climate of such a boarding school. Catherine and

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<sup>317</sup> Charles Henry Monsall born 1812 married Harriet daughter of Sir Edward O’Brien (uncle of Catharine Spooner). After Monsall’s death in 1851 Harriet Monsall became a sister of mercy.



Charlotte Bronte were both clergy daughters; they were contemporaries and both writers but there seems to have been little more they had in common.

In the way of all such families, comings and goings in the parish were significant. A new curate, William Knox Marshall, appointed in 1833, became her sister Louisa's fiancé a year later. Her brother went off to Oxford and Matilda to Switzerland to be 'finished'. As these major events proceeded Mrs Marsh became increasingly frail and died. It was a tremendous blow to the whole family but most particularly to Catherine and her father. Catherine records:

So blended was her spirit in all his highest interests that just after he left the chamber of death, my father said to us 'I feel as if my ministry were ended, and at another time when we had gathered round him and our eyes fell upon her vacant place, in the warmth of his wrung heart he said 'We thought we had loved her as much as it was possible to love; but now, if he had her back again, we should almost be tempted to put her on a pedestal and worship her.'<sup>319</sup>

Catherine was sixteen that year, she was confirmed, William Marshall was offered the living at St Mary's Bridgenorth and Mary married the Rev. Francis Trench. To the lively, overflowing vicarage these departures brought about an inexorable change. Catherine became her father's sole support and stay. It is to be wondered what would have happened if the next curate to cross the vicarage threshold had fallen in love with Catherine. Would she have had to decide between her own fulfilment and her obligation to her lone and widowed father? He deplored his single state: 'The married life is the happiest, the single is solitary, the widowed miserable.'<sup>320</sup> He was in fact to marry twice more, and probably would never have held back his daughter from her own happiness if she had sought it away from him, but this was not to be. After the death of his second wife Catherine had commented: 'I bless God many times in the day that I have formed no sort of link which can prevent me from living for you.'<sup>321</sup>

He was not happy to accept this sort of sacrifice however. He was aware of her devotion and the role she had taken on, relinquished and once again resumed, as his stay and

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<sup>318</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 108

<sup>319</sup> Catherine Marsh (1867) Life of Rev. William Marsh p 173

<sup>320</sup> Life and friendships of Catherine Marsh p 25

<sup>321</sup> ibid p48

comfort. There were undoubtedly plenty of ‘possible’ men whom she had met visiting her father and at the homes of friends and relations and yet we are not aware of anyone more special than her father. He had answered her, ‘My Darling, you must not pass by any more opportunities of possessing a home of your own, for the short time with me.’<sup>322</sup>

It was not inevitable, at that time, that all young women would indeed marry, for they were in an undoubted majority. The 1851 Census had revealed a surplus of 400,000 women. There were going to be an increasing number who remained spinsters. Not everyone saw this as a negative outcome. Frances Power Cobbe in 1862 was to remark ‘The ‘old maid’ of 1861 is an exceedingly cheery personage,’<sup>323</sup> whereas W R Grey, in an article in the National Review in 1862, presented an alternative view,

that spinsterhood was an abomination, celibacy an unnatural state and the life of the unmarried, for both men and women, essentially unsound and unstable and the source of immeasurable wretchedness and mischief.<sup>324</sup>

However, much this may or may not have been Catherine’s state, she did not spend her time evaluating her condition. Life in the vicarage, though quieter, continued in the same way. Catherine had her role already established as clever daughter, busy writing when not involved in the endless round of classes, clubs and services. She had learned the necessary feminine skills of needlework and crochet and could ply her needle at working parties and in preparation for fancy sales and fund-raising events. In addition to her teaching and visiting, at eighteen she was already attempting to fill the role her mother had done so successfully, but not sufficiently to prevent the burden of extra work falling upon her father and undermining his health. He sought a smaller parish and this time the removing was just down to Catherine and her father. It was a wrench. She had built up networks of friends and familiar and responsive parishioners and now they were to abandon all this for a Warwickshire parish in the smart watering place of Leamington. She reassured herself in her journal and her friends in her correspondence...

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<sup>322</sup> *ibid* p 48

<sup>323</sup> Frances Power Cobbe (1862) ‘What shall we do with our old maids?’ in Fraser’s Magazine

<sup>324</sup> W R Grey (1862) ‘Why are women redundant?’ in the National Review April 1862

But everywhere there are poor people to be helped, the sick and dying to be visited, mourners to be sympathised with and souls to be sought and won for Christ.<sup>325</sup>

Her friend Caroline was not convinced. It was in this context that she exploded with her indictment of the prospect of ‘sixty years of sour sisters and Sunday Schools’.<sup>326</sup> She speaks of ‘insufferable dullness’ and the need to keep each other cheerful and receptive to the joys and beauties of nature and human concern.

The changes in Catherine’s life had all been significant; the removal of her father from one parish to another, the marriages of her sisters, the death of her mother. And yet she was never the instigator of change, merely one whose life was greatly altered by it in the wake of family events. As in all clergy families, there was an acknowledgement that no one place was permanently ‘home’. They were as much the incumbents of ‘tied’ accommodation as any agricultural worker or domestic servant, whether the accommodation itself was grand, commodious or just plain inconvenient. Always, when their father was called to move to another parish, there was the mutual support and comfort of the family. Yet as move followed move, there were fewer in the family to adhere to, and after the death of her mother and the departure of her sisters the management of the household fell into the lap of Catherine. Inevitably there were servants, loyal from times past or engaged in the new parish,<sup>327</sup> but Catherine was nevertheless, mistress at the vicarage, and she would have expected to maintain a comfortable and efficient household for herself and her father. Her biographer records that ‘Katie was getting on well in her capacity as head of the household.’<sup>328</sup>

But this was not all she did. She had been brought up to work in the parish, to visit and read and teach. There were societies to form and groups to lead. She comments on her busy life: ‘Could you only see the scramble after time every day of my life in this very stirring corner of the earth.’<sup>329</sup> There is an impression of a very lively young woman who,

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<sup>325</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 28

<sup>326</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 35

<sup>327</sup> One such was Anne C, a girl she found selling matches when Catherine was on a visit to her sister Jane in Scotland. Catherine took her under her wing and she was installed as housemaid in the Rectory at Beckenham where she remained for the rest of her life. (O’Rorke p 68)

<sup>328</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 26

<sup>329</sup> *ibid* p 26

no matter how dutiful, was not above handing around sugar plums to the delighted audience of a missionary meeting that had gone on too long.

It is not clear at which point in her life, if there was a point, Catherine began to see her future as being one of a single woman with a mission, rather than potentially that of a wife and mother or simply her father's mainstay and parish worker. What is clear is that the parish scenario was not going to be sufficient for either her energies or her talent. The option of becoming an author, whether of fiction, biography or evangelical texts and stories was always a possibility. It was something middle-class women could do at home and which would not compromise her respectability (though many who did publish hid behind male pseudonyms or took on the mask of anonymity).<sup>330</sup>

Catherine was twenty one when the move was made to Leamington. Her father had not found his widowed state easy to come to terms with. Within a year of their removal to Leamington, he met and married Lady Louisa Cadogan. However salutary, the acceptance of a new stepmother was not without pain. Catherine and her sisters greeted the newcomer but, on the evening of the wedding, she admits that 'Matilda and I shed our tears in our own room'.<sup>331</sup>

There was a positive side to her father's marriage though which resulted in greater freedom to visit friends and relations and to continue to nurture and encourage the network of caring and shared interest she had across the country. In current days of immediate worldwide connection and instantaneous communication it is quite remarkable to contemplate the tremendous network of friendship and support it was possible to have at that time. Catherine Marsh 'kept in touch' with vast numbers of people, mainly through her correspondence but also through visits both given and received. (see figure 3) She put very great effort into maintaining human contact. She wrote to relations, her sisters, their children, their husbands, as well as to female contemporaries like Caroline Maitland and men like her friend and the ultimate subject of her first biography, Hedley Vicars. She kept track of past parishioners, men and women whose paths she had crossed *in*

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<sup>330</sup> In fact Catherine rarely used her name either, in what seems to be a common practice of the period, being referred to as 'the author of English Hearts and English Hands or whatever her most recent literary success.

<sup>331</sup> Lucy O'Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 88

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*extremis* as they lay in hospital or in the depths of despair. She sent cards and tracts to acquaintances, soldiers, prisoners, workers in orphanages and workhouses, to cab drivers and chimney sweeps. In her later years the burden of so much writing told upon her so that she began to have a printed message and just append a few words.

**Figure 3. Catherine Marsh**

All this communication was not what she was called to do so much as a reinforcement of the fact that she valued the individual. A clergy family inevitably moved from one parish to another. Having a brother in orders and sisters married to clergy meant they too must move from place to place. So visiting, in all their previous and current places, gave a nucleus of family surrounded by a parish full of folk to call upon, and anyone visited was not forgotten. Particularly remembered were those to whom it had been her lot to bring comfort in a time of sorrow or sickness, and more especially those to whom she had brought the comfort of the Gospel. They, in turn, were often keen to retain their contact with the woman who had been partly instrumental in their conversion. But if this were true of the parishes of her family, it was also magnified by the numbers of people she encountered in all the other places she went, whether on visits to friends or holidays or because she had read somewhere of a need.

Catherine was living in Leamington and remarking that: 'My life here is quietly dissipated - pleasant but not workaday enough to satisfy me for any great length of time.'<sup>332</sup> She acquired a skill of reading character from handwriting, she got to know her stepmother and she began to develop an interest in politics. It was a time, later known as 'The Age of Reform' when the desperate situation of the poor and of living and working conditions in London and the industrial cities was being brought into the public eye by investigative journalists and reformers. Newspapers brought Catherine information about situations and causes that troubled her, and her father's own involvement in causes brought them to their door as when, in 1847, their home became a centre for famine relief and, in 1848, when she helped diffuse a potential Chartist riot. She began to make items not just for local fancy sales but for more distant charities, feather screens for the Irish famine relief, socks for soldiers, texts and tracts for travellers. She began to add politicians to her letter list. It was her means to reach out into a world beyond the parish and to involve herself in wider concerns. Then, while still a young woman, her sister Louisa died; Louisa who had seven children and who was married to William Marshall, a clergyman. Suddenly there was a role for Catherine. She took on two of her nieces as the family shared out the grieving children.

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<sup>332</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 79

Then her stepmother died and once again she was her father's mainstay. She had made a good relationship with her stepmother and, as we have already noted, her father was not one who could contemplate the single life. Within a brief space of time he married again and once again Catherine's position was altered. Her sister Mary was married to Frederick Chalmers who had been her father's curate at Leamington. In 1850 they removed to Beckenham in Kent. It was a significant move in Catherine's life though she did not yet know it. However, the work at Leamington was becoming too much for her father and he was happy to accept an invitation from his son-in-law to become his curate in his new parish. So the family, William, his new wife and the faithful Catherine moved to Kent and the real changes in Catherine's life began at last.

Settling in to a new parish was always made easier by the fact of there being things to do and a long held acceptance of the role of the parsonage family. Differences might come in the state and status of the local families, the presence and evangelical aggression of non-conformist causes and the nature of the patronage of the local squire. There were families with whom one mixed socially as well as church workers, children to teach, servants to instruct and parishioners to visit and tend. This was the nature of any rural parish, varying mostly in its degree of affluence or poverty and in the occupation of its parishioners. It required the same skills of its clergy family and they in turn preached the same Gospel. But this time something remarkable happened which was to change Catherine's life and that of many around her. Jerusha Richardson, in Women of the Church of England, comments that: 'It was her promptitude in coping with an exigency of parochial work that put into her hands her life task,'<sup>333</sup> but it was a comment in a letter from Catherine's niece Louie which was most significant and prophetic in its response to the inevitable pains of uprooting once again:

But there is wanted at Beckenham some one who will labour as lovingly and earnestly among the people there, as you have done among those at Leamington, so God wants you there, and is sending for you in this way, but it will be a great trial to you, my Auntie<sup>334</sup>

Into the quiet of the Kent countryside came an 'invasion' of three thousand navvies, set to re-construct the Crystal Palace which had been designed by Joseph Paxton to grace

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<sup>333</sup> Jerusha Richardson (1907) Women of the Church of England p 266

<sup>334</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 73

Hyde Park and to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. The men were billeted throughout the villages and clergy and others trembled at the prospect of what their arrival would create in terms of disruption and difficulty in their quiet parishes. They had, however, reckoned without Miss Marsh.

What was so remarkable for Catherine Marsh was that world and national events should combine together in a Kentish village to take over her life. The destruction of the French fleet at the end of 1853 pointed France and her allies, Britain and Turkey, to move towards war with Russia. As troops were gathered for the inevitable war in the Crimea, so the navvies gathered at Sydenham to reconstruct the Crystal Palace. The navvies are the connecting element between these two events but it is Catherine’s involvement with them, with a hero of the Crimea and with the Army Works Force assembling in Kent prior to departure for the war which brings these separate strands into this history.

Catherine’s first contact with the navvies began when she visited a house at which several were lodging, in search of a man who had been ill. He was absent, but, while waiting, she engaged in conversation the other men and left the house some hours later having prayed with them and they, in turn, had promised to attend church. Her first large-scale tea party put on for them was totally over-subscribed. It would seem from her biography that these men became her firm friends. She preached to them, undoubtedly, but she also taught those whose literary skills were poor, she helped nurse them but most of all she took them seriously; she listened to their troubles (these travelling men, often away from home for months on end), wrote letters for them and generally was seen by those close to her as their friend and advocate. Her brother in law, the Rev Frederick Chalmers, in his preface to her book English Hearts and English Hands, comments on his own and others’ surprise at the positive benefit this invasion of navvies had on their community:

It was little expected that two or three hundred navvies could take their abode in a country village for two winters, and instead of spreading moral contagion, set a good example to its many inhabitants<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Catherine Marsh (1858) English Hearts and English Hands preface p vi



It was not a surprise to Catherine. She respected the men and they in turn appear to have respected her. More than that they inspired each other - the men to trust her and in many cases to turn to God as she encouraged them - and she to write about them, to use their lives and their stories in what became her second major book. There was a very considerable feeling of unworthiness in many of the men, a sense of being outside the pale, beyond saving, but she, in believing in them and giving them her time and effort so unstintingly, convinced them of their value and bolstered their self esteem. This was a totally conscious act. Elizabeth Garnett, another champion of the navvies herself commented: 'These men have no homes, they are wanderers, they cannot settle, they are rough and reserved, simply because their higher feelings are seldom appealed to.'<sup>336</sup>

The work she did amongst the navvies was very hard and intensive as is so often the case with someone of great energy and a strong and powerful personality. It is hard for others to act in their stead or absence, but realism decreed she could not be everywhere and that the men must trust her co-workers and recognise that it was the Saviour she worshipped who was their means of grace and not the woman herself. On many occasions she was accompanied by her sister Matilda, or Louie, sister of Hedley Vicars (see below) and they were acknowledged as being 'the Beckenham ladies' though she was undoubtedly always the leader and the principal source of inspiration. The book that emerged from this work, English Hearts and English Hands<sup>337</sup> was at once successful. It was an inspirational volume full of human case studies, evangelical in its purpose but eminently readable. It is about individual men, their struggles and difficulties with health and injury, with separation from wives and families, with the temptations of alcohol, gambling and sex and with the battle for their redemption. Best of all, its heroes are working class, ordinary, unheroic in any dramatic sense but immensely brave nevertheless, in their facing up to suffering and death. What is important is Catherine's intended audience for her book:

This little book is not written for those who are normally called the working classes. Its purpose... is to show men and women who are placed by the providence of God in another position of life, how much of high and delicate feeling is to be found amongst that

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<sup>336</sup> E Garnett 1855) Our Navvies p 77

<sup>337</sup> Catherine Marsh (1856) English Hearts and English Hands

great mass of their countrymen who eat their bread under the heavier portion of the primeval curse.<sup>338</sup>

In this instance she is not writing about these 'working class heroes' as role models for a working class, not very literate readership, but in order to bring their situation to the attention of the middle class, their possible employers and those possessed of a vote and/or the means to view in a different light these people different from themselves. It was the theme of common humanity which motivated not only the writing but the rationale behind its publication and its intended readership.

In many case histories within the book, we are faced with the question of the 'good death', the 'happy ending' in which the hero does not survive or recover but is counted happy and victorious because he has recognised his Saviour at the last and 'gone to his reward'. Her somewhat romanticised view of heroism was not however, only the stuff of novels or memorial literature but also relates to an actual relationship and source of inspiration - one of the major influences of Catherine's life - a young officer, Captain Hedley Vicars.

She discovered him when she and her family were visiting his parents. He was already a soldier, it had been always his ambition but he had moved from a wild and fairly reckless life to something altogether different when he had come to make a profession of faith. He remained a soldier and believed he could be a 'soldier for Christ'. Catherine and Hedley immediately struck up a friendship which was to sustain him for the rest of his life. He seemed to find it possible to confide in her, to speak to her of deep and spiritual matters and to do so, not only face to face but also in an almost daily correspondence. He, along with large numbers of young men, was preparing to embark for the Crimea. He was training and recruiting men who would be asked to give their lives for their country. Being an infantryman was hard but the lives the men were escaping from were desperately hard also. They had to be put together in a united, fighting force. Captain Vicars found the examples of the men in Catherine's little books of individual lives of navvies, appealed to his soldiers. There was a sense of identity with these other men away from home, in hard conditions, doing dangerous work and deprived on the most part from the gentle or calming influences of women and family. Being a navvy was in

fact more dangerous than being a soldier, ‘Their accident and death rates were higher than any other group in Britain, including colliers, including soldiers fighting nineteenth century wars.’<sup>339</sup>

Being an officer in charge of men, Hedley Vicars was also concerned about how the men Catherine was ministering to were treated by those in charge of them:

One of the subjects of regret which has occupied my mind since I have become acquainted with Life on the Line<sup>340</sup> has been the want of sympathy, generally speaking, between the contractors and the men whom they employ.<sup>341</sup>

Here, as in so many areas, he was totally in accord with Catherine, concerned as she was to acknowledge the worth of these men and, as we have already read, prepared, if necessary to use her book as a means of reaching the consciences and consciousness of the ‘respectable classes’. There were many injustices and unhelpful practices in the management of casual labour, which they and others campaigned to bring to an end. The whole system of manpower which was underpinning the massive undertakings of railway and canal building and house construction for the population growth of the industrial age, was unregulated and required men to tramp from site to site in pursuit of work. Their plight, arriving cold, foot sore and penniless at a potential workplace, was obvious to Catherine and she began to organise hot penny pies and drinks for them. Evils like the truck shop were fought when it was clear employers were exploiting their workers. It was the kind of thing a well-connected and determined woman like Catherine could deal with, by sweet reason with contractors, but more still by systematic and importunate lobbying with those in positions of influence. And, as an alternative means of reaching this newly encountered but far-flung community, there was the Navy Mission Society and the newsletter in which she could write to encourage and inspire its readers.

The relationship of Catherine and Hedley developed considerably when he came to stay at the Beckenham Rectory, preached to the navvies, (‘a strong young man among strong

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<sup>339</sup> Dick Sullivan (1983) Navvyman p 5

<sup>340</sup> Catherine Marsh (1858) A Light for the Line

<sup>341</sup> Catherine Marsh (1858) English Hearts and English Hands p347

young men’),<sup>342</sup> and went about the village visiting with Catherine. There was a sense of a shared ministry - she was happy to speak to ‘his’ soldiers and he to ‘her’ navvies. Their concern was the same - that no one should go forward in this life, particularly into danger and the prospect of death, without the reassuring knowledge of the love of Christ and the certainty of their own forgiveness and salvation. They shared not only this but a manner of relating to the men which encouraged and inspired them; he by his youthful strength and compassion, she by her gentleness and bravery in the face of rough men and tense situations. While he would ultimately have to fire his men up to go into battle, her role was more often to diffuse anger and soothe men into a more accommodating frame of mind.

As the time came for his departure he spoke more and more to her of ‘the comfort of love between Christian friends’,<sup>343</sup> but that was all it was. They shared an intense and passionate friendship, born of mutual affection and respect, shared values and beliefs expressed in an almost daily correspondence. Hedley Vicars did have someone with whom he had a more romantic relationship and Catherine does speak of her but without mentioning her name. Her account of his departure is truly moving and indicates that, whatever his feeling towards this other woman, his relationship with Catherine was very special and important to him:

While waiting for the train..... he added in a low undertone, though slightly hurried “ I have one last favour to ask of you. When I am shot, write to my mother, see her when you can; comfort her as God will teach you.” During the delay which followed, before the train started we read the 121<sup>st</sup> psalm in the waiting room...There was something that day which struck like a distant knell upon our hearts. It was a foreboding time. However, strongly hope may have sprung up after-wards, we felt at that moment that it was our last parting.<sup>344</sup>

Thus Catherine was able to identify with the other women bidding farewell to those they loved, strengthened by her faith but intensely anxious and fearful for the outcome. However, although it was their last parting, it was not their last contact and he continued his correspondence with her right up to the day of his death, and she was able to draw comfort from his bravery, his leadership and his constancy for many months to come.

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<sup>342</sup> Catherine Marsh (1856) A Memorial to Captain Hedley Vicars p 119

<sup>343</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 120

The 97<sup>th</sup> Regiment did not proceed at first to the Crimea but to Piraeus, where many of his men fell sick with cholera and Hedley Vicars came to experience the horrors of military hospitals. He worked hard to make a bad situation more bearable for the men for whom he was responsible. Those not in hospital still suffered all the miseries of a bitter winter, inadequate supplies and shelter. These were not the challenges for which he had prepared his men. His horror at the inadequacies of the supply organisation was relayed to Catherine and others in his letters. He used his own money to provide additional comforts and even necessities for his men. Eventually they were moved up the line and into battle. Catherine followed his progress, for whatever the inadequacies of supply, the postal service does seem to have remained efficient. even if sometimes letters came in bunches. Vicars was grateful for all these tangible connections with home - letters from his sisters, from his parents and from Catherine. They buoyed up his spirits and he, in turn, strengthened them as they continued with their lives ever watchful for newspaper reports and telegrams.

Catherine put much of her energy into persuading those in power that a day of fasting and humiliation because of the war was a real necessity for the nation. She had written constantly to Prime Minister Palmerston as well as Archbishop Sumner and Bishop of London Tait, pleading with them to hold such a day. This had met with some resistance as being 'unpatriotic' but she persisted and such a day was held and observed, not only at home, but also in the trenches of the Crimea. Catherine was jubilant when permission was given. She recounts how the church in Beckenham was crowded to overflowing for each of the many services held that day. The date was March 21<sup>st</sup> 1855 and Hedley Vicars observed the day also, choosing appropriate readings and prayers for his men and his fellow officers. He used some of the day also to write to his family and to begin a letter to Catherine. The letter remained unfinished because, during that night, a party of Russian soldiers broke through into adjacent trenches and when, in the morning, they attacked the unprepared 97<sup>th</sup>, Hedley Vicars led his men in a counter attack. There was no doubting his bravery. He was wounded in the shoulder but carried on encouraging his men and leading them with his sword held high, until he was mortally wounded. He

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<sup>344</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh pp 145/6

was carried back by his men but too much blood had been lost and he died. The news of his death came some weeks later via a younger brother at the Foreign Office. Eventually, the word came to Catherine - news that she dreaded but half expected. He had written to her: ‘Jesus is near, and very precious to my heart and soul...May he ever be to you also, my second mother’, and she, in her sadness could say no more than ‘I have lost the friend who was my own soul.’<sup>345</sup>

Following Hedley Vicars’ death, Catherine was approached by his family to write a memorial volume. It was something she could do to help keep her promise to him and comfort his family. They wanted such a book because it perpetuated his memory, but it also allowed his example to continue its work amongst other men in similar circumstances. The book was well received but its continuance and Hedley Vicars’ fame and immortality, were born out of the combination of the undoubted goodness of his life together with his biographer’s desire to spread the example of it to others faced with peril and adversity. When she put the draft of the book out to her friends, Caroline Maitland and Henry Sherer, whose comments she valued, they both advised her not to praise him overtly but to let his virtue be told through his own letters and deeds. It might seem that she heeded this advice when one considers the comments made by the Vicar of St Martin in the Fields when the biography appeared (see note <sup>288</sup> above). Its influence continued, initially due to Catherine’s distributive zeal, but later on its own reputation, in the many wars and battles that continued throughout the century. Through Catherine’s writing he became a hero to people who had never known him, a role model to soldiers facing the Indian Mutiny, to men on the barricades of the Paris Commune, to battle-weary infantrymen in the Franco-Prussian war.

Not that the publication met with total approval, for there appeared in 1856, a series of pamphlets on the ethics of war in which it is criticised in an article entitled Soldiership and Christianity: being a review of the Memoirs of the late Captain Hedley Vicars:

A little book has been recently published, which has reached extraordinary circulation and celebrity among a certain section of the religious world. Though, in some respects, a work of singular interest and beauty... it is being viewed by many who seem to

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<sup>345</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 119

imagine that the example of a good man is of value enough to justify or consecrate a bad system.<sup>346</sup>

Catherine’s response to this is not recorded but she had considered the nature of war and the difficulty of a Christian taking up arms to kill his fellow man. The writer of the pamphlet goes on to say that ‘the war was produced by the blunders of diplomacy’<sup>347</sup> (‘Someone had blundered!’)<sup>348</sup> The pamphleteer’s accusation of the ‘blinding influence of educational prejudice’ is hard to attribute. Is his target the jingoistic patriotism of the mob or the ‘armchair soldier’, the ‘*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*’ of the officers and leaders or the under-supported, ill- provisioned, strangely-led and cruelly outnumbered, rugged persistence of the men in the trenches and the hospitals? Hedley Vicars saw all the squalid reality of life and death in the trenches. His example was to his men to look beyond this and to their own personal salvation. He saw his faith as a liberation of his self to be a good ‘soldier for Christ’. He was brave and he wanted ‘to die a soldier’s death, doing deeds worthy of his soldier-fathers’.<sup>349</sup> The curious thing is that he did, indeed, inspire others to bravery both in battle and in the hard life working men endured, and it was this combination of his life and death, and Catherine’s undoubted ability to empathise, to write, to seize the moment and to market her work unashamedly, that united them in life and death. In the preface to a tract she wrote following his death she attacks those critics who ‘still maintain that entire devotion to the heart of Goodness will draw a man from many of the active duties of life... (this book is) ‘a fresh and ample refutation’

Brave, Kind and Happy or ‘Words of Hearty Friendship to the Working Men of England’ is a tiny 3” x 4” limp covered book with large print accessible to less accomplished readers. It cost 3d and was an ideal size for a pocket. It tells of the death of Hedley Vicars and some of his unselfish acts. It is dedicated to:

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<sup>346</sup> Soldiership and Christianity: being a review of the Memoirs of the late Captain Hedley Vicars (1856) : p

<sup>347</sup> *ibid* p 4

<sup>348</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson (1854) The Charge of the Light Brigade

<sup>349</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) The Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 119

*The working men of England who, without exception  
(during my intercourse with 1000's )  
have always shown towards me  
frank cordiality as a friend, and respectful  
courtesy as a woman*<sup>350</sup>

Catherine's venture into the literary world, the world of politics and into the evangelical and social ministry could be described as the call she had been waiting for. She had been prepared for only a small portion of this work - as a clergy daughter, and later an adult member of her brother-in-law's rural vicarage family, she had always known the ways of visiting, cottage meetings, confirmation classes, sewing and thrift clubs but in almost all descriptions of involvement of women from clergy households, their province was always that of the female parishioners. She could have been expected to concern herself with the training of the vicarage maids for service in larger houses, preparing women for childbirth and household management, running Sunday School classes and choirs, teaching in the village school but almost always with children, with women and girls and with elderly people - hardly ever with men. And yet it was this ministry and involvement with men, and more especially men of what the stereotype would have deemed 'violent' or 'uncouth' or 'dangerous' which became the focal point at this stage in her life. Her earlier experience with men was generally with the more gently reared; her brother, brothers in law, her father and various curates, men of her own social class visited by the family, and men, mostly clergymen undoubtedly, visiting her father.

By the time her serious ministry began she was in her mid-thirties, a pleasant looking woman who liked pretty things and enjoyed and nurtured close friendships. As we have discovered, she had forsworn dancing and the theatre at an early age as being inappropriate to her style of life. She seems to have been universally liked even from childhood by friends, parishioners, her stepmothers and her brothers-in-law. She must have had some charisma, some quality of response to people that made them warm to her and give her their trust, but beyond that she had and was developing other skills which may have grown from the 'framing and fashioning' of her childhood but which she

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<sup>350</sup> Catherine Marsh (1858) Brave, Kind and Happy



learned to take further. The charm and sensitivity with which she had been able to engage the navvies and soldiers may have given her confidence to approach other daunting presences, thus enabling her to challenge building contractors and managers, purchasing officers and quartermasters, in order to provide her version of comforts both for footsore navvies and sea-sick or confined soldiers. In addition, she had developed a persistence in the face of negative responses (as with the Day of Humiliation) which may have branded her 'the importunate woman' but which nevertheless, achieved its aim. These are skills developed on a much larger scale than in the rural parish.

It is understandable that Catherine should have been particularly impatient about the nature of the 'call' in her life for she had felt 'called' to do something more dramatic and had had to face the bitter pill of rejection. The sight of the many men preparing and sailing for the Crimea, and the accounts relayed through the press and correspondence of the need for nurses in the hospitals of Scutari and other places, had fired her imagination. Here was somewhere she could serve, somewhere where her existing experience in sick visiting and care for the souls of the departing could be used. But it was not to be used in this way - Catherine was even interviewed by Florence Nightingale, but she did not have the necessary training in nursing and without this there was no possibility of her being taken on. It was a bitter blow to her to realise that loving concern, limited home nursing and an immense desire to be involved were not sufficient but she had humility enough to know that what she could offer was not what was required and she must wait for an indication of what was to be her true role.

...it is a great thing to have an aim in life, beyond momentary self-happiness, an interest in others is a rich mercy.<sup>351</sup>

This interest in others, once aroused, was not to be abated or to follow a single limited track. As the conflict in the Crimea ceased to be the stuff of editorials and wounded lists and the names of the fallen were inscribed on the parish notices, a new cause for 'England's sons and heroic martyrs'<sup>352</sup> arose in the Indian Mutiny. Catherine used her influence and connections to help set up a library for wounded soldiers in Calcutta and began to visit and minister to East India Company cadets billeted nearby. 'She did not

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<sup>351</sup> Lucy O'Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 67

<sup>352</sup> *ibid* p 141

let her feelings evaporate in words; they were turned to a practical use.<sup>353</sup> There are numerous examples of this. It seemed she had a gift of identifying need and finding a way to supply it. It was a gift grown from empathy, an ability to think ahead and into situations she had never known. As already mentioned, she had identified the need of navvies arriving at a site without sustenance and had organised provision of food until they were paid. Another account is given of her concern for two of the Army Works Force<sup>354</sup> who, having been given their allocation to purchase clothing for their time in the Crimean had had insufficient funds to purchase any warm vests to go under the distinctive 'slop' jackets. Catherine searched all the local shops until some were found but to her consternation the men's ship had sailed. Anxious to fulfil her promise to them she searched around and found a young man who could borrow a small boat and row out to the troop ship as it moored in the estuary awaiting the tide. Word came to her ultimately that the vests had been delivered - witness to her faithfulness to her promises and to the inspiring image she created which allowed others to want to help her carry out her practical mission.

Hearing of the long and tedious sea journey to Sebastopol, or out to India, she arranged for the provision of board games, light reading and dominoes on board the troop ships. Here followed a period of such enormous variety of activity, demanding huge amounts of energy and stamina and fuelled by a desire to minister, an enquiring mind and a propensity to embrace causes, particularly when it meant defending the underdog or people on the margins and edges of society. If these men 'on the margins' had come to find her in Kent, and had opened her eyes to a parish much wider than anything available within the normality of the Kentish villages, then she found it necessary to seek them out in the other places, and on the other margins of society. She was not alone in her concern for the navvies. Other women championed the navy and his way of life - Anna Tregelles, Katherine Sleight, the Countess of Harewood but predominantly Elizabeth Garnett. She was also a clergy daughter and wife (though widowed on her honeymoon) and took up the navvies' cause as her own, calling herself a navy and

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<sup>353</sup> *ibid*

<sup>354</sup> The Army Works Force was set up to recruit navvies and engineers to travel out to theatres of war in order to back up the fighting forces with whatever building or construction was required. In the case of the Crimea the plan was to construct a railway to take troops and supplies up to the front line.

labouring alongside them to set up the Navy Mission Society and to produce a newsletter which gave them, apart from Christian teaching and case histories, news of building developments, of other navvies and practical advice about first aid, alternatives to alcohol and points of contact for these isolated men. Her lobbying contacts were less elevated than Catherine’s who was, as Sullivan puts it, ‘always unintimidated by the great’.<sup>355</sup>

Contemporary historians of the navvies and their rise and fall differ in attributing influence to such women. Brooke, in his The Railway Navvies, that despicable breed of men (1983), describes at length the involvement of Elizabeth Garnett but does not even mention Catherine Marsh whereas Sullivan in Navyman, while also crediting Elizabeth Garnett with her particular achievements, has large numbers of mentions of ‘Katie Marsh’ as he describes her, and uses her biography as one of his sources. Both conclude that navvies and the clergy were not naturally compatible and that in fact there was often bad blood between them. The quotes of malevolent feeling are not just from the navvies, for there are multiple instances of seemingly very unchristian attitudes from clergy in towns and villages where navvies had been billeted or building work had taken place. Garnett, herself, has a chapter in Our Navvies entitled ‘The Clergy and the Navvies’ and she contends that where navvies proved troublesome and violent there had already been a bad feeling between them and the clergy, whereas when the clergy had the courage to treat them in a civil and respectful manner, the positive results have been startling.<sup>356</sup> This was certainly true of the villages in the parishes of Catherine’s brother-in-law and father but even had they not been liberal and understanding themselves, the influence of Catherine would have been hard to resist. However, Sullivan acknowledges that the negative attitudes of the navvies did not extend to the female members of many a parsonage family:

Navvies were much more open to parson’s wives and daughters, untouchable in their muck-long frocks, not unlike pedestals. In turn, by accepting them, these wives and daughters made navvies more acceptable to society by changing peoples’ perceptions of them. And a sense of acceptance by society must have made the navy more receptive to society’s religion.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Dick Sullivan (1983) Navyman p 202

<sup>356</sup> Elizabeth Garnett (1885) Our Navvies

<sup>357</sup> Dick Sullivan (1983) Navyman

It would be easy at this point to reflect that Caroline Maitland's prediction of 'sixty years of sour sisters and Sunday Schools' was totally inappropriate but, while Catherine loved those she was surrounded by and those she worked with, her own loneliness among a family who in every generation had husbands and wives and children did not fail to be recorded in her journal and in her biography. As the last daughter at home she comments on her journal 'which has cheered so many lonely hours' and later, when, in the status of single woman, she is dependent for her home, first on her father, then on her married sisters and their husbands, and finally on her niece and her husband, she remarks; 'I love to see my father enjoying my stories - it shortens the cry in my heart when alone in my room'<sup>358</sup> and, at another time: 'My mercies are great, but I feel a very lone woman.'<sup>359</sup>

But if the conventional vocation of marriage and motherhood was denied her and the less conventional adventure as a military nurse was not to be, then there were no ties to prevent Catherine from looking for other avenues to extend herself. At home in the Rectory at Beckenham she enjoyed the comfort of the pleasant surroundings and the company of her sister and her family. It was a secure home in the understanding of secure homes for clergy families which were, ultimately, not secure at all. It was after all 'tied' accommodation but in the present circumstances it afforded the kind of refuge Catherine needed between her journeys and wanderings, and somewhere from which she could address and receive her immense correspondence.

Much of the lighter side of Catherine's personality is seen through her correspondence with Caroline Maitland, a friendship they had begun as young women and which they were to maintain all their lives. Caroline always regarded Catherine, only a couple of years her senior, as the more worthy, the more accomplished of the two of them but it is to Caroline that Catherine turns at every significant point in her life (and also in pursuit of the trivialities of life too). She valued her friend's comments on her writing and their occasional meetings when on holiday together were held together by their frequent and detailed correspondence. In her later years Catherine came upon a bundle of their letters 'sheets crossed all over, all our old jokes and troubles.'<sup>360</sup> Nevertheless, in all their

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<sup>358</sup> Lucy O'Rorke (1917) Life and friendships of Catherine Marsh p 67

<sup>359</sup> *ibid*

<sup>360</sup> Lucy O'Rorke (1917) Life and friendships of Catherine Marsh p 24

sharing of the trials and joys of life, the 'dread' of being thirty and therefore, 'middle-aged' it is Catherine who is more philosophical about it than Caroline. She had sought to comfort her :

We are alike in our weaknesses. I was quite wretched when my thirtieth birthday came, but I was better after it! I liked the thought of our Saviour beginning His Ministry at thirty, and I began my first cottage-reading that night, Could you not begin one?<sup>361</sup>

Caroline's reply is negative and adamant:

I have still a month to strengthen my mind against the coming of Age. I defy an Angel to like to be thirty. I won't begin a Bible Class. I should not know what to say. It is all very well for you who are born an orator....<sup>362</sup>

There is mention of a book which they had both read, and on which Florence Nightingale, a woman celebrated in her time but also an unmarried daughter, had seen fit to comment. In 1845, a novel by S. Stevens appeared called Some passages from the life of a daughter at home. It is the story of a family of girls and a widowed mother in which three of the daughters adapt happily to the tasks allocated (and eventually marry), and the fourth has very great difficulty with the problem of duty, struggles with conflict between her own desires and her conscience, but does eventually take the path of duty. It does not immediately lead to happiness...'Anna was certainly happier before she became extremely good'<sup>363</sup> For Anna, the heroine, there is insufficient in her life to keep her occupied or happy, until she learns to put duty before idleness. It would be hard to see how Catherine could identify with this for the sin of sloth would not seem to be one to which she was prone. Nevertheless, there are passages in the book which obviously struck a chord with Caroline and caused her outburst. She does comment that 'there is not so much as the entrance of a decent man from the time she first sits in her morning room.'<sup>364</sup> Caroline does seem to be looking at the future in a different manner from Florence Nightingale. It is to be assumed from her comments that she would happily leave behind the single life were an alternative offered her, whereas it is clear from Florence Nightingale's biography that, although she did have proposals of marriage,

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<sup>361</sup> ibid p 69

<sup>362</sup> ibid p 69

<sup>363</sup> S Stephen (1845) Passages from the life of a daughter at home p 88

and that she did regard 'marrying a man of high and good purpose and following out that purpose with him is the happiest 'lot'',<sup>365</sup> she did not see it as the natural or predestined fate of everyone:

I don't agree at all that a woman has no reason (if she does not care for anyone else) for not marrying a good man who asks her, and I don't think Providence does either. I think He has as clearly marked out some to be single women as He has others to be wives, and has organised them accordingly for their vocation<sup>366</sup>

The narrative of 'Daughter at home' does look on the heroine's behalf into the future, and questions: 'How would the flattened spirits of mature age stand the constant stress of such a life as lay before her?'<sup>367</sup> The nature of this 'life as lay before her' did trouble Florence Nightingale, as it troubled the heroine in S. Stephen's book, as it concerned Caroline Maitland, and as we have learned, it troubled Catherine Marsh. It is the manner of using the time given that is important, the nature of tasks, the value of effort, the possibility of making contributions to the good of mankind and perhaps the realisation or the fear that, with increasing age and diminished energy, these altruistic aims and efforts would no longer be the means of filling up the space left in a solitary life. In Retrieving Women's' History the questions of invisibility and Florence Nightingale's philosophy of usefulness are addressed:

Nightingale strenuously evolved her own religious code of self-fulfilment, concluding that God wishes us not to sacrifice ourselves to duty but to develop our own strengths and abilities for the sake of humanity<sup>368</sup>

However, having made a decision to remain single she had clear ideas of what this might and certainly might not mean: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord! not Behold the handmaid of correspondence, or of music, or of metaphysics.'<sup>369</sup>

There existed a perception that single women should be engaged in suitable occupations, not contributing to the stereotype of 'lively butterflies who float and glitter in

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<sup>364</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 35

<sup>365</sup> Sir Edward Cook (1913) The Life of Florence Nightingale. p100

<sup>366</sup> Sir E Cook (1913) Florence Nightingale, a Life p100

<sup>367</sup> S. Stephen (1845) Passages from the life of a daughter at home p 93

<sup>368</sup> J W Scott 'The problem of invisibility' in Retrieving Womens' History: changing perceptions of the role of women in politics and society SJ Kleinberg (ed) (1988) p 408 Berg, Oxford

<sup>369</sup> Sir E Cook (1913) Florence Nightingale, a Life p 94

the fairyland of wealth and fashion'<sup>370</sup>, if not busy raising children and being a wife then doing something constructive. However, neither Anna in the novel, nor Florence Nightingale nor Caroline Maitland, were clergy daughters and therein lies a difference. Catherine's life did not equate with this empty and unfulfilling scenario. There was an established style and pattern to her life which would have filled too much of her time for her to find it heavy on her hands. The tasks within a parish were many, the labourers always fewer than needed. 'When voluntary workers were few and far between and often when they were not, ministers found in their wives (and daughters) willing workers',<sup>371</sup> There was implicit a requirement that a clergy wife or daughter would guide and direct as well as carry out evangelical, social, medical and philanthropic tasks but her friend Caroline does not see this as being necessarily a joyful or totally fulfilling future for a still young woman. There creeps into the correspondence this concern that there might be more to life and that she could do something more if God guided her to it.

After a period as his son-in-law's curate the Rev Marsh moved for the last time, this time to take on the small Surrey parish of Beddington. No matter how settled she seemed to be, Catherine went with him and his wife to yet another vicarage. Here there were some new challenges. The parish turned out to be on the route of the travellers to the Epsom races. Catherine had been brought up with strong views against the evils of theatrical entertainment, drink and gambling. Racing was therefore, not a desirable activity and the temptation to waste money would be there. She decided to set up an alternative occasion to the much-heralded activities of Derby Day. She marshalled the villagers to lay on a tea party for the mill workers and those who might be tempted by the festivities. Tables were set out with refreshments and cricket organised for the village green. It was, one might suggest, a gamble with their credibility but it paid off, for the majority of the workers, with their wives and families went no further and enjoyed the simple pleasures offered by the kind lady from the vicarage. Thereafter, the Alternative Derby Day became a feature of village life.

Such involvement at home did not prevent her continued visits to all sorts and conditions of people throughout the country.

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<sup>370</sup> Ellen Ranyard quoted in Frank Mort (1987) Dangerous Sexualities, p 55

<sup>371</sup> Rosemary O'Day (1995) Retrieved Riches p 53

A journey was a real pleasure to her and never an idle time. Her large handbag, well stocked with books and plenty of writing materials was soon opened and a letter begun unless conversing with some fellow traveller.<sup>372</sup>

Small boys on a train journey, not especially delighted to share a carriage with an obviously sensible lady, were won over with supplies of butterscotch. Soldiers in barracks, mothers with children, hay makers in the fields could all be talked to and helped. She visited the Hulks to meet convicts awaiting transportation to Australia, she visited Preston Gaol and talked to the prisoners. It was a case of never missing an opportunity for the Lord. Even when, on a visit to Brighton, she was taken ill with bronchitis and had to extend her visit, she ended up holding Bible studies for the waiters and maids in the Royal Albion Hotel where she was staying. It was the same opportunism that drove her to always slip a tract or a little text across to assistants in the shops when buying goods and when, in later life and with less time and energy for shopping she took to buying by mail order, she always slipped in a book when she paid her bill. It was a sort of opportunist evangelism; not so much heavy handed as omnipresent. Meanwhile all of the visiting and evangelism was done alongside the provision of practical help or subsequent lobbying of those in power. In addition, wherever possible, she contributed financially to causes from her own resources, essentially her earnings from publications. Some of the expenditure was on the reprinting of texts or publishing of tracts but she was not unaware of the need to support more practically:

But two months ago I bought Tennyson's poems and ever since I have thought that its price might have bought nine pocket Bibles or eighteen family dinners.<sup>373</sup>

However, she was also concerned with the political and theological concerns of evangelism. She entered into correspondence with Benjamin Jowett at Balliol and James Anthony Froude. To visit her father came Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society bringing the first black bishop, to receive Dr Marsh's blessing. During the visit Catherine and her brother in law concerned themselves with the visiting servants and Fred Chalmers ended by baptising one of them in his own language. Not all her interventions were religious though - an encounter with Sir James Simpson, the inventor of chloroform,

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<sup>372</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) The Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 269



prompted her to contact him when she found it was not being widely used. She persuaded him to use his influence to have it used in the hospital she had just visited. Another encounter, with a consultant dentist, allowed her to have a visiting position with a London hospital. She had no regular base in the capital and was prepared to travel up on the train, but an acknowledged position gave her an entrée and a validity of purpose that to her was very welcome

Although she spent all of her life living in one or other of the vicarages or rectories occupied by the men in her family she never lived alone. It was not an acceptable situation for a woman and because all her families made her welcome, and she would undoubtedly have made her own contribution to the 'rectory business', the problem of her homelessness does not arise as an issue. It was much more of a problem for other women engaged in philanthropy, such as Octavia Hill's housing workers. Catherine commented herself that 'If I were homeless, I would live in London and be clever and do all the good ... (others) do'. Notwithstanding her good relations with all her extended family, she must have been aware, at each death of a loved one, that the requirement to move on would be inevitable and immediate. Another upheaval was then to enter her life with the death in 1866 of her much loved father. She had been a good and faithful daughter, but at his death she was homeless again. She went down to Brighton to visit her niece Lucy, now married to her father's ex-curate Henry O'Rorke. She was familiar with Brighton and it had an excellent train service to London.

Then, in the summer of 1866 another life changing event took place. An epidemic of cholera swept through the capital and, as ever, the poor housing conditions, inadequate sanitation and provision of clean water conspired to assist its spread through the warm August days. Catherine read of this in the newspaper and took this as a call to arms. She visited the cholera wards and observed the suffering. She read to and prayed with the victims and their families and she, along with her namesakes Catharine, wife of the Bishop of London Tait, and Catherine, the wife of Prime Minister Gladstone, appealed to the population for help through the medium of the national press. Their principal concern was the care of the survivors of the disease, too weak to be returned safely to the unsanitary conditions from which they had come. All three decided to offer short-term

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<sup>373</sup> Lucy O'Rorke (1917) Life and friendships of Catherine Marsh p 70

convalescent accommodation. Catherine’s interest was with the mothers and small children. It was vital to remove them from the capital and the risk of further infection. Her first refuge was the vicarage at Beckenham, home of her sister and brother-in law. Later she took over cottages in Epping Forest, made available to her by Sir T. Foxwell Buxton, and finally settled upon a property at Blackrock on the Downs above Brighton. The support system of the family, with the shared understanding of the need to respond quickly to identified needs was called into action. Their houses became convalescent homes. Her colleagues, the other Catherines, set up orphanages for boys and girls in North Wales and in Kent. They identified these children as the surviving victims of the disease, often losing both parents within a number of hours and having no means of support.

All three women encouraged donations to the Bishop of London’s special fund. They appealed for useful things as well as money, ‘sheets, blankets, old linen, clothing of all kinds including black clothes whether old or new, tea, arrowroot, sago and wine.’<sup>374</sup> Catherine also did the other thing she was good at. In order to raise awareness of her cause, and bring comfort to many, she wrote about her impressions on the cholera wards in another tiny book Death and Life. (see figure 4)

The illustrations are not especially comforting but the tales of deathbed conversions, and in some cases remarkable cures, made it a popular book. That done, she could return to her next major work, put on hold during the epidemic, the biography of her father. The Guardian reviewed it kindly:

In the biography of Dr Marsh by the loving hand of his daughter, it is impossible to contemplate the portrait save as some picture of the Summer by Coreggio or Carlo Dolce, and finished up to perfection by the most delicate and loving hand, without admiration.<sup>375</sup>

But Catherine was not to remain close at hand to pursue a literary career. Fate, or the patronage of her nephew-in-law, called him to a living at Sheriff Hales in Shropshire and

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<sup>374</sup> letter to The Times 10th August 1866

<sup>375</sup> The Guardian January 1867

**Figure 4. Frontispiece of one of Catherine Marsh’s small format books**

so Lucy and Catherine went with him. Although celebrated in her field as an evangelist and constantly in demand for preaching engagements, Catherine saw her place within the vicarage family. It had been her life, all her life long, and it was the source and root from which she saw her ministry and her works. Jerusha Richardson describes her as a ‘clergy woman’ and I suspect she would have had no trouble with that description as it was understood at the time. Female clergy had over a century to travel to their recognition within the Church of England, and in spite of their acceptance within the Free Churches this was not Catherine’s world. She did preach, but always with an understanding that she would never do it in the presence of other clergy. She felt it was not her role to take over, or imitate theirs, if they were there to do it. Curiosity and interest drove a clerical colleague to deceive her at one point, by sneaking in with his ‘dog-collar’ hidden by his muffler, confident of her failure to detect his deceit due to her less than perfect eyesight. She preached to large numbers, to eight hundred on one occasion, or to small groups in prison cells, or workers’ cottages. No change of

residence or status seemed ever to daunt her - what did was inactivity, and in Shropshire there was insufficient scope for her energies. It would be necessary to look for further challenges.

Even buried away in rural Shropshire however, the postal service continued to serve Catherine and her mission. Having established an orphanage she needed to be in correspondence with others in that field. She corresponded with Barnardo and with Shaftesbury. The latter had some very supportive words to say on the subject of women in philanthropy and religion.

Your letters and your little books are invaluable to us. They fill me and mine with the conviction that God is about to do great things for the world by the instrumentality of pious women, ‘the grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice’, they have, as it were, an instinct in religious things that no man can attain to.<sup>376</sup>

Despite such encouragement she maintained a diffidence about preaching and encroaching on the work of the clergy while they and others saw no such intrusion but rather valued what it was that she could and did offer. It would seem to have been tied up with her view of herself in a supportive role rather than as a leader or initiator. Could it have been that because she had throughout her life maintained a subordinate role as daughter, sister in law, aunt, visiting single relative always within the parish of a male relative that she saw this as a determining factor. This would create potential conflict with what seems to be the clear leadership and pro-active role which she adopted when dealing with those towards whom she directed her mission? It is tempting at this point to conjecture, if she had married, how she would have interpreted her role as wife and to what extent she, in a marriage, would have been an equal partner or a supportive woman.

News of conflict travelled swiftly, even to Sheriff Hales, and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 meant a translation of a soldier's prayer to be put into both French and German. To Catherine, men in trenches were men in need of inspiration. Nine years later, the Zulu war also came into the frame of Catherine's concern. The mere distance from great scenes of activity was not a problem to her as long as the post, the telegraph and the newspapers were functioning. At this point also she began a new, though not

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<sup>376</sup> Lucy O'Rourke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 266

successful venture and became editor of a monthly magazine ‘The Harbinger’ but it was short lived and, unable to pay its way, after seven months it folded. However, yet another move was in the air, for the ailing Henry O’Rorke took another parish, this time at Feltwell in Norfolk and Catherine moved to her last home.

The large rectory gave ample room for the family of which she was always considered the head. Henry O’Rorke and his wife filled the place of son and daughter and their children, and in later years their grandchildren added greatly to her happiness: all were devoted to her and she was devoted to them.<sup>377</sup>

Within the village there were the same requirements as always, the poor and sick to visit, the children to teach, the groups of women to encourage, the labourers to engage with, the gentry to call upon. Each village must have been different but the requirements for the clergy family were always broadly the same and enabled the residents of the rectory to quickly become involved in the community and to feel at once at home. Nor was Catherine ready, in spite of her increasing age, to remain closeted within the rectory, comfortable though it became when she was able to bedeck her room once again with treasures from the wanderings of her huge circle of friendship and acquaintance.

I have had my old faded red cotton velvet screen dyed black and I have caused my maid, under my eye, to tie there-to with narrow ribbons of many colours, quantities of little photographs found long ago, and old locket, with New Zealander’s necklaces interspersed, and above all, flowers out of New Year’s cards, cut by myself.<sup>378</sup>

Cambridge was only an hour away and she saw her way to work with and influence students. It was not without some trepidation that she took on a different community for her mission. Although invited to speak at Girton, she admitted, ‘I had rather dreaded the criticising tendency of the learned young women but I never had a more warm and loving thanks after a meeting than was theirs.’<sup>379</sup> Her involvement coincided with Moody’s mission and 50 Cambridge men and 30 from Oxford volunteered for missionary work in Africa. The inspiration of the mission fired up Catherine in her work, this time not among people on the margins of society, but amongst the more favoured. She had not, however, abandoned her social or political concerns, and continued to correspond with

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<sup>377</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 256

<sup>378</sup> *ibid* p 244

<sup>379</sup> *ibid* p 289

Prime Minister Gladstone on policies about Ireland, Bradlaugh and vivisection. On Ireland she comments: ‘What a state they have brought Ireland to! They cannot govern themselves and they have made it impossible for any others to govern it.’<sup>380</sup>

In the pattern also of so many upper-class, and certainly clergy families, she began to winter in warmer climes, and included trips to Italy in addition to her preaching visits and time spent with members of her extended family. To winter in southern Europe was commonplace among many of the more comfortably provided clergy and made a demarcation between them and the less affluent career clergy with no private income or wealthy benefice to fund their travels. These travels were also used for purposes of seeking cures. As her eyesight deteriorated (her father had lost his sight temporarily through cataract) she sought a cure in Wiesbaden for the same condition. Her eyes were not ready to be operated on, but she took the waters for her rheumatism. She reflected stoically on her failing health: ‘It is a rule generally that we break up piece by piece not altogether and we must take the conditions of it patiently.’<sup>381</sup>

She returned later with her sister, by then an eighty-year-old widow, who had suffered from loss of sight for thirty years. In her case, there was great success, and her sight was restored but the apparent early resolution of Catherine’s problem was soon reversed and, thereafter, her sight became increasingly bad until she became entirely blind for the last three years of her life. Age brought with it also the inevitable loss of friends and family dear to her. 1885 she had described as her ‘year of sorrows’ for within it died her much loved brother-in-law, Fred Chalmers, with whom she had lived at Beckenham, her great friend Lord Cairns and her dear friend Lord Shaftesbury. Such sorrows she dealt with by continuing her work while commenting ‘the sadness of living is outliving.’<sup>382</sup> She attended the evangelical conventions at Keswick and wrote constantly to friends and to political allies and adversaries. When the writing became difficult, she took to having notes printed but she still wrote a book every year.

It was another eleven years before she closed the book on two more of those dearest to her, her sister Matilda Chalmers, and her long-standing and closest friend Caroline Fuller

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<sup>380</sup> *ibid* p 300

<sup>381</sup> Lucy O’Rourke (1917) Life and friendships of Catherine Marsh p 320

<sup>382</sup> *ibid* p 320

Maitland. That they saw each other infrequently as time moved on, diminished not at all the quality of their friendship and further demonstrates the power of the pen in the maintenance of close and loving relationships over long distances and many years. On Fred Chalmers’ death, Florence Nightingale, another friend and frequent correspondent, wrote

It is the breaking up of a whole chapter in the history of Christ’s church - that of Beckenham and the names of Marsh and Chalmers,<sup>383</sup>

and when Catherine sent her copies of her books to put in school and hospital libraries she replied

I find your little books such a great help to lives. I find even uneducated people so anxious to know whether ‘that Beckenham’ is where the lady who wrote ‘Light on the Line’ lived.<sup>384</sup>

But even though no longer attached to Beckenham, the Marsh presence was felt in her surroundings. At Feltwell there was only one post a day. A friend, Sir Arthur Blackwood, became secretary to the Post Office and granted it a second post. This greatly pleased at least one of its inhabitants for whom the post, even with her diminished eyesight, was her link to the world. Gradually, however, she began to find the stairs too much and she retired to her room. It was quite possible for her to ‘hold court’ there, as elsewhere, with Henry and Lucy O’Rorke and their daughters to bring to her all the business of the rectory. Meanwhile Henry’s health continued to fail. Catherine had discussed with Lucy a friend who had had a stroke, and who had lost all power of speech. She had commented that the blessing was that she had all the more opportunity to commune with her Lord and prepare to meet Him. The irony of this was that this was to be her fate too. Henry O’Rorke was diagnosed as having heart disease and in December 1911 Catherine suffered a stroke. It is recorded by Lucy O’Rorke in a letter to parishioners of Feltwell:

On December 22<sup>nd</sup> (1911) our beloved Aunt, Miss Marsh, between whom and my Husband there was a love like that between mother and son, was still enjoying the clear powers of her mind and her memory. He and I had been with her in the evening as usual and she repeated four beautiful hymns to us. ... We bade her good night and we never heard again her dear uplifting words; for early the next morning the stroke came, which made her helpless and

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<sup>383</sup> *ibid* p 308

<sup>384</sup> Lucy O’Rorke (1917) Life and friendships of Catherine Marsh

speechless....The shock of that sudden sorrow was greater than my Husband's tender heart could withstand, and from that day his illness increased.<sup>385</sup>

By this time she had been totally blind for three years, but this took away her power of speech. She was only able to communicate with her family by the pressure of hands. There was little blessing in quick relief, and it is to be hoped that she did enjoy the opportunity to commune with God. In the spring Henry died of heart disease. The inevitable departure of the widow and family from the Rectory however, was delayed because of the invalid upstairs. The new rector was appointed but did not wish to move her and took lodgings in the village. For eleven months she remained conscious but with no speech or sight until at last she was able to depart 'onwards and upwards'. For a woman whose whole life had been taken up with communication and involvement with people, it seems a cruel blow to have been denied the very means of communication that had been so essential to her, and with which she had so readily served her family and friends, the people on the margins who had become her parish, and Her Lord.

Her memorial service in St James, Piccadilly, was attended by the eminent and the humble. In addition to the Rector of St James and the Dean of Canterbury, the service was conducted by her great-nephew, the Rev Harry O'Rorke. Of the many letters of condolence received by the family it would seem appropriate to quote that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson (son-in-law of Catharine Tait):

My earliest recollections are associated with English Hearts and English Hands and for about half a century I have been more or less in touch with her though at a distance. She is the last of the band of notable 'Catherines' who used to be grouped together forty years ago. Such a life, when its even-tide comes, requires *Te Deum* not *Miserere*.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Lucy O'Rorke (1912) Letter to the Parishioners of Feltwell. <http://www.feltwellnorfolk.freemove.co.uk> p 2

<sup>386</sup> Lucy O'Rorke (1917) Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh p 388



## 2. 'Fram'd and Fashion'd': Catharine Tait (1819-1878)

Will you be diligent to frame and fashion your own selves, and your families, according to the doctrine of Christ; and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lieth, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ? I will apply myself thereto, the Lord being my helper.<sup>387</sup>

So, as we have noted, every priest at his ordination, makes a promise not only for himself, but for his wife and his family. It is a great undertaking, for it is assumed that he may answer for them. He is declaring himself not alone in the tasks set before him.... not alone because the Lord is his helper but also, in this exemplary life he is about to undertake, he is declaring a commitment to a way of living on behalf of a woman he may not even yet have met, and for any number of children not yet born. To be the wife of a priest in the Church of England implies vows additional to those of the marriage service, a commitment to serve God as well as a husband. To be the child of such a man brings with it an understanding not even contained within a vow, a commitment required through accident of birth.

It is the aspect of 'framing and fashioning' by a clergyman of his wife and children that interests me and on which I would like to expand. The words are picturesque and illuminating in the manner of seventeenth century English used in the prayer book. Framing, perhaps within the constraining structure of the church and its expectations, limiting the extent of that which is contained, defining clearly the boundaries. Fashioning has an altogether different image - one that involves not restriction but nurture, encouragement, development; maybe the moulding of a raw material, the transformation of something simple into something more complex. And the product of this activity - a blueprint, a template, an example to be learned from and followed. The one is about the appearance, the perceptions the image, the other about its activity, its personal qualities, its achievements, its outreach, its soul. In this chapter I want to look at how these two forces, of framing and fashioning manifested themselves within the family of Archibald Tait and most particularly in the life of his wife Catharine, for with his own words Tait acknowledges the importance of these forces: 'It is impossible to judge rightly of the

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<sup>387</sup> from The Ordering of Priests The Book of Common Prayer

character of my dear wife without considering the influences which surrounded her early days.<sup>388</sup>

Handbooks and books of guidance for the clergy in the nineteenth century address themselves to the clergyman, but only occasionally to the wife and family. Three years after the birth of Catharine Tait, the Reverend Leigh Richmond had written a letter to his daughter on the eve of her marriage to a clergyman:

Study your own and your husband's dispositions, that you may cultivate true conjugal peace and love. Ever be ready to open your heart to him on things spiritual as well as temporal. Disappoint him not herein, for he will watch over your soul, as one that must give account. A minister's public labours are intimately connected with his private and domestic consolations.<sup>389</sup>

There are very clear indications for clergy as to what their duties are to their children, from George Herbert's exhortation in a chapter entitled A Parson in his House that, 'his children he first makes Christians',<sup>390</sup> to the longing of an early nineteenth century clergy wife Sarah Clayton, who led her life as wife of the Rev. John Clayton adhering to 'her earnest desire for the salvation of her children and praying all the while to hear from them a cry of "What must I do to be saved?"'<sup>391</sup> Similarly another clergy wife, a contemporary of hers, Eliza Berkeley explained that her 'first care for her children (was) the salvation of their souls; secondly the cultivation of their minds and manners, next the forming of their persons.'<sup>392</sup>

This, overtly evangelical, requirement for a conversion experience is not expressed in all clergy families however. Within some there was, and is, such a sense of being of and within the church that there is no consciousness of ever being anything else. This is what some, who have grown up within the church, would describe as a Christian upbringing totally nurtured by love and faith. It does not mean however, that children growing up within such a household, will not seek to find different expressions of their faith from their parents, nor that husbands and wives will want to express their faith in an entirely similar manner. This was the case with Catharine Tait, both with regard to her parents and her

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<sup>388</sup> William Benham (1879) Life of Catharine and Craufurd Tait. p 3

<sup>389</sup> Leigh Richmond (1828) Memoirs of the Rev. Leigh Richmond p 547

<sup>390</sup> George Herbert (1898) The Country Parson p 38

<sup>391</sup> Thomas Timpson (1854) British Female Biography p 384

<sup>392</sup> Eliza Berkeley (ed) (1799) Preface to Poems of George M Berkeley p 91

husband. But the common element, the vital, essential part in their relationships was the holding of a strong Christian faith, which shone through whatever doctrinal, or theological differences there may have been.

Returning to the Reverend Leigh, he saw the resolution of such questions in terms of obedience. A simple matter... 'If you and your husband happen to differ in opinion and feeling upon any point remember whom you have promised to love, honour and obey. This will settle all things.'<sup>393</sup> When Catharine Spooner married Archibald Tait at the parish church of Elmdon in Warwickshire in 1843, it is almost certain that she promised to obey him. It was the standard wording of the Prayer Book service and it is doubtful if it would have caused so much as a *frisson* of a question as to whether a wife might do anything other than obey her husband<sup>394</sup>.

Many of the other promises of the marriage service remain pretty much unquestioned over the years. Most weddings do have a sermon or some sort of admonition by the priest as to how the couple may help each other and how those of their friends and family there gathered may also help and encourage them in what is now acknowledged to be a difficult quest towards a lifetime together. The Book of Common Prayer, in use until well into the second half of the twentieth century, does have an alternative to a sermon if none is given. It is almost certain that neither Catharine Spooner's uncle Gerard Noel who conducted the service, nor her father, Archdeacon of Coventry as he was, nor any of the whole family of clergy to whom she belonged, would have missed this opportunity to speak in very personal terms to this much loved and very talented couple on such an occasion. and so matters of subjection would probably not have been raised. In his journal on the eve of his marriage Archie Tait wrote;

Almighty God, this is the most important day of my life I pray thy infinite mercy ....let this day be the beginning of a new life of holiness. If it is not I have but inclosed (*sic*) an innocent and holy being in misery. O Lord may I learn from her to give my life to thee. May we be united in thy faith and fear, she is one to live to thee. Save us O lord from my hard evil heart and make me with her thy servant for ever.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Legh Richmond (1828) Memoirs of the Rev. Legh Richmond p 548

<sup>394</sup> There were, at a later date, 'Suffrage weddings' in which brides had refused to include the promise to obey and cases where priests were sent to weddings to insist on the inclusion of this promise.

<sup>395</sup> Tait Papers, Lambeth Palace Library

This is not a man seeking obedience or subjection from his wife but one who, in all humility, seeks to be worthy of her and to learn from her.

Catharine Spooner was born in 1819, the youngest daughter of William Spooner, Rector of Elmdon and Archdeacon of Coventry. With her sisters, she gained her education at home, in the firm tradition of clergy daughters learning from their mothers, conversing with their fathers, with constant access to a well stocked library and stirred on and stimulated by conversation with older brothers during school and university vacations (see chapter ‘The Clever Girl at the Vicarage’). It is unlikely that Archdeacon Spooner’s library would have contained many novels, but it would seem to have had on its shelves more than just theological texts and biblical commentary. Her love of poetry, her interest in history and her fascination with travel writing, all arise in later comments in her writings and those of her relations and visitors. She was an avid reader, always wanting to share books, have them read aloud during meals, to recommend them to others and, days before her death, she had missed her way, walking through the Lake District, because she was reading as she walked, provoking her husband to suggest that her eyes might have been better employed following the road. While her correspondence confirms the nature of her education, her husband’s description of her early life reinforces it:

Her daily routine was to read some interesting book of history, philosophy or theology all the morning, to teach in the Sunday school, to visit the cottagers and help them in their difficulties and almost every evening towards dusk, to take a long walk through the parish with the much loved father, to tend the somewhat failing health of the dear mother who was a perfect model of a Christian lady, directing all around her by the gentlest influences.<sup>396</sup>

Her father was a leading evangelical and his visitors reflected this inclination but the connections of his sons and daughters brought other theological perspectives into the house. Also his brothers, both as Lord of the Manor and as Member of Parliament - ‘Uncle Dick, ... full of extreme Tory politics and puzzling questions of finance’<sup>397</sup> and her mother’s family, Irish landed gentry at a time of immense religious and political upheaval in Ireland, brought to the Spooner household a richness of opinion and diversity which

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<sup>396</sup> Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait

<sup>397</sup> Ibid

more than compensated for its rural and isolated situation and the physically limited horizons of Catharine’s early life.

Although Catharine Tait was never the wife of a simple country clergyman, she was herself familiar with such lives, having grown up in a country rectory. This firm footing in the heart of the English rural community is fulsomely described in an article in a publication called The Clerical World (A Paper for the Pulpit and the Pew) (1882):

When Hall and parsonage chime well together, this form of government has a mellow goodness worthy of the golden age, and fragrant as the golden pippins under the fruit-wall of old years gone by; .... It is not to be believed that any better school than such a parsonage can ripen the character of “a perfect woman, nobly planned” and such a one was Catharine Spooner.<sup>398</sup>

Catharine, I suspect, would have found such a description remarkably pious and stuffy. She was possessed of an intellectual curiosity, an understanding and an informed mind that prepared her well for the life she was to know. She was part of a large family and accustomed to meeting the variety of visitors, clerical and other, who came to see her father. She was widely read and strongly self-disciplined, two attributes which were also to stand her in good stead. The conversation in the Elmdon Rectory was not restricted to its male residents and visitors, and Catharine Spooner was aware, even as a young woman, of the schisms within the church and the passions which drove men to express their love of God in very different ways.

Within the district lived relations of her mother’s at Hallow Park. Their neighbours at Powick Court were Lord and Lady Wake and Lady Wake’s brother was Archibald Campbell Tait, a young Oxford don. It is Lady Wake who chronicles in her Reminiscences the first meeting of her brother Archie and the fifteen year-old Kitty Spooner (as she was known in her childhood). While they ‘suited each other exceedingly well’ their paths were not to cross again for several years

... the threads of their lives having been thus brought together, it was impossible for them to meet as strangers when their destiny should again place them side by side. But there was no thought then of the fair picture which should in God’s good time be woven into the tapestry of a united life.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> from The Pulpit and the Pew in The Clerical World (1882)

<sup>399</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) Reminiscences of Lady Wake p 182

The mirrors of her early life are many. Catherine Marsh, daughter of the Rev. William Marsh, was a family friend. They knew each other as young women and then again much later in life when, together with Catharine Gladstone, they united to fight the cholera epidemic in London in 1866 (see chapter on Catherine Marsh p 170). Catherine Marsh's image comes from a letter she wrote to Catharine's widower when he was seeking early memories for her biography ... 'My first remembrances of her are of a dream of loveliness, so fine, so soft, so gentle and with so musical a voice.'<sup>400</sup> Her sister-in-law also describes her in similar vein: 'a girl of fifteen with lovely dark eyes, bright loving and truthful.'<sup>401</sup> Her husband's biographer, Bickling echoes this... 'exceedingly beautiful in face and form;'<sup>402</sup> and while one might be sceptical of so much predictable admiration, a more unsolicited testimonial to her physical appearance exists in a comment from a rather crusty and cantankerous elderly relative the Tait's visited in the Midlands, who not only presented her with precious flowers from his greenhouse but also followed it with the remark 'monstrous fine woman, Mrs Dr Tait.'<sup>403</sup>

Her sisters married and left home, her brothers took up their orders, but Catharine appeared to be happy to remain as the daughter at home, supporting her father and tending her mother. Her mother's one criticism was that she was a poor correspondent - due doubtless to her deep involvement in so many things - describing her as a 'little busy bee, so much occupied you do not find time to write,'<sup>404</sup> though she recommended to her the baby son of her cousin, Samuel Wilberforce - 'a sweet little thing, very pretty, you would like to nurse it.'<sup>405</sup> Her mother's absence was itself mostly occasioned by her desire to be with her daughters in their confinements but, with the capable Catharine at home, it was perfectly possible for the Archdeacon's wife to be 'from home'. With the constant coming and going of so many relations and the wide age range of cousins, nephews and nieces, there were always small children to amuse in addition to the more serious aspects of her life. She had travelled little in her growing years, not seeing the sea until she was quite grown up. A major excitement had been the family's visit to the relations in Ireland, and this had filled the impressionable youngest daughter with

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<sup>400</sup> Lucy O'Rorke The Life and Friends of Catherine Marsh p 10

<sup>401</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) Reminiscences of Lady Wake

<sup>402</sup> A C Bickling (1883) A Sketch of the Public Life of A C Tait p 15

<sup>403</sup> *ibid* p 234

<sup>404</sup> Tait family correspondence 1832-1878 Part 102 piece 32

concern for the Irish clergy. Contact with the Irish cousins, established at this time, was enduring and there were constantly visitors from across St George's channel at Elmdon and at all the subsequent Tait residences. It would be hard to underestimate the importance in Catharine's life of these visits. She was an intelligent and well-informed young woman but she was also impressionable. She had been, as her sister-in-law described:

...carefully brought up in her father's views. Her earnest mind had received with deep conviction the blessed truths of the Gospel of Christ, and this made her, though scarcely more than a child, extremely interesting...<sup>406</sup>

Into the world of this young woman came not only the evangelical clergy friends of her father, and the friends and associates of her brothers and sisters, but also the diverse clerical attachments of her mother's family: her uncle Gerard Noel, younger brother of a celebrated Baptist preacher, her cousin Henry O'Brien, who ultimately joined the Plymouth Brethren but who brought with him different views from those she had hitherto encountered, and later Edward Fortescue who married her sister Frances, and who had been enthused by the teachings of Newman at Oxford. From this cocktail of religious influences, there was much for a person of strong faith and lively mind to draw upon, but it was this last influence that was to prove the most potent. Her husband in later life was to cite her ambition, at the time, to become a schoolmistress in a village where the young priest Edward Fortescue was in residence. The requirement for personal holiness accorded well with Catharine's vision and was further enhanced when she encountered Charles Monsall, another brother-in-law described here in later life by his widow:

Catharine was in the first burst of her life, full of vigour and enthusiasm, and my husband with his calm deep hold of the supernatural life attracted her with an attraction that never lost its power over her.....To a mind like Catharine's, full of living sympathy with the High Church movement, you can understand the joy of meeting one who was in the full vigour of the life of that movement,<sup>407</sup>

It is remarkable that the young Catharine was not totally confused or overwhelmed by so many powerful and opposing influences. It is possible that, as I have already suggested,

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<sup>405</sup> *ibid*

<sup>406</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) (1909) Reminiscences of Lady Wake p 182

<sup>407</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 214-5

the nurturing in the faith had been so implicit in all her upbringing that it could transcend difference and, while choosing a path that accorded with her own feelings, she could, nevertheless, hold on to her own personal position within the Church of England at her father's side.

However, it is clear that she did not move from one to another of these quite diverse manifestations of the Christian Church without feeling some pain or concern. In a letter to her fiancé, she describes the feelings she experienced when, having seen another way than that favoured and promoted by her evangelically inclined father, she continued as his dutiful daughter in her parish activities:

'My father wishes me to go to the meeting. I always accompany him at home and there was a time when I fancied nothing could equal either the benefit or delight of attending these meetings - most fully can I enter into my then feelings, at the same time that so entire a change has come over my mind that the pain of going is greater than the pleasure ever was.'<sup>408</sup>

It would have been interesting to know to what extent Catharine discussed her changed and changing feelings with her father. If her morning readings of theology and philosophy came from his library shelves, then it may have been stimulating for them both to discuss such texts; she with her enquiring mind and concern to travel productively the pilgrim's way along which her Christian life would seem to lead her, and he, glad of the opportunity to further 'frame and fashion' his intelligent and questing daughter. There is certainly no indication, in any of her correspondence with Archie, of any conflict between her and her father other than in the quote above, and we are left to conjecture whether either she kept her own counsel, or whether her father was aware of her difficulties but understood and tolerated them. Because of the immense diversity of religious allegiance represented by the whole Spooner and O'Brien families, it is likely that a deep sense of tolerance did prevail and that for Archdeacon Spooner, the importance of their shared faith and Christian commitment outweighed, ultimately, any theological differences. Archie had, in later life, to be grateful for this steeping of his wife in the works of English theology:

I have always like to think that her eager study of these thoroughly English and practical and devotional works left an

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<sup>408</sup> letter from Catharine Spooner to Archibald Tait 1843 Tait papers Lambeth Palace vol 102 piece 175



impression on her mind which time never effaced, and was one of the means that kept her heart ever loyal to that church into which she had been baptised.<sup>409</sup>

That her father was deeply saddened when eventually this daughter married and left home, is recorded in his correspondence and, again, her biographer describes her as: 'an exceedingly lovely girl, the sunshine and joy of the whole household, full of mirth, elasticity and buoyancy of spirits.'<sup>410</sup>

Archie Tait's life plan was to be a clergyman first, but, given his considerable academic ability, probably a don and a university cleric in practice. He fulfilled both of these plans... his abilities were sought after as a teacher and he became a fellow of Balliol but, after his ordination, he chose to be attached to a parish and to learn the ways and life of a parish priest, which he was able to do in the village of Baldon outside Oxford. His was not going to be a quiet life, nonetheless, for matters of moment, the birth of the Oxford Movement, the contentions between high and low church and the consequent passionate representation of different religious views, brought him into the public arena. In 1841 his letter to Essays and Reviews, strongly criticising Tract 90 and Newman's moving towards Rome, was published and to those who read and concerned themselves with the high politics of the Church of England, this was a clear statement of position from a young man who was beginning to be known.

Circumstances can change very swiftly however, and the death of Thomas Arnold, celebrated Headmaster of Rugby School, found colleagues encouraging the 29 year old don to put in an application. He had no experience of teaching children or of running a boarding house. He was contested by strong and experienced candidates but, to the amazement of many, he was appointed. His sister, Charlotte, was delighted but also aware that it would be a difficult task to take on for a young bachelor used to life as an Oxford don. She had an inspiration, made enquiries about her continued availability, and then sent him a letter, reminding him of the young woman he had met some years before, and living in a direct route along the turnpike on the other side of Coventry. He replied with a telegram, 'I have received your testimonial in favour of Miss Catharine

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<sup>409</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1891) Life of AC Tait p 206

<sup>410</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1891) Life of AC Tait p 202

Spooner which shall receive due consideration'. His next communication with her, some time later, contained only one line: 'Hurrah, I have proposed and been accepted'.<sup>411</sup>

It could be suggested that, since he needed a wife in order to better accomplish the task of running Rugby School, Catharine Spooner was conveniently available and that she, fortuitously, was amenable to the match, indeed that this was a marriage of convenience organised by sympathetic but managing relatives and friends on behalf of a man who had, practically speaking, very little time to seek out an appropriate partner himself. Undoubtedly Charlotte, Lady Wake played a very strong part in this, and if one were to build a picture of the coming together of this couple simply on her testimony it would appear a very straightforward and simple matter. Fortunately, we have more material from which to establish an image of the preparation for marriage of two people who took the whole business very seriously, and it is their views about what marriage could and should mean that are essential to my writing of Catharine Tait's biographical chapter and, indeed, to my whole thesis.

The journey for the young clergyman from Rugby to Elmdon would have been by horse or stagecoach. Consequently, much of their courtship was carried on by post. As lovers do, they sustained themselves between meetings with an affectionate correspondence, full of gentle endearments, regrets at the time and distance put between them, explanations of misunderstandings, pressures of work (his) and self-reproach for asking too much (hers). Yet even within this tender exchange of love, passion and daily triviality, there is already a glimmer, from both sides, of an aspect of their future life together, which would demand more than anything they had yet encountered. Catharine writes..... 'being blessed and happy ourselves must make us more conscious than ever to do all we can for others....'<sup>412</sup> She was deeply concerned about her future role as his wife – at that time as the wife of Headteacher. She seemed to see, even then, that she was entering into a partnership every bit as vocational as any other calling. The practicalities of their meeting, once they had refound each other, were resolved by Catharine, whenever possible, visiting family friends at the vicarage at Dunchurch, just outside Rugby for, after all, a headmaster could not be absent for long periods from his school, particularly with a house to run as well as colleagues to lead and staff to

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<sup>411</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) (1909) Reminiscences of Lady Wake p 202

manage. So, after a very brief period, their troth was plighted - part of a letter from Catharine a fortnight after their engagement sets the tone for their relationship and her understanding of what it would mean:

This day as being the day of our betrothal, my thoughts are with you, in fact I have been as it were going over this day fortnight again. ....I went alone into the garden and thought of all you said and all I replied and felt again the overwhelming feelings of that hour, only so much more happy, such a full assurance and deep thankfulness for the feelings that we both had been guided aright, that it is not so much our own doing as the very portion which was chosen for us, given to us and how if strength is but given us to use our blessings aright I feel sure that every day will give us greater cause for thankfulness.<sup>413</sup>

In a later letter she continues this theme...

How blessed a thing it is, to trace a ruling hand in all our earthly portion, to feel that it is given us, and we are prepared and made fit to meet it, in all that it offers to us, quite a new life both of happiness and trial and danger.<sup>414</sup>

But if at this point Catharine was considering that she had been led to this marriage by a guiding hand, it may be important to reflect upon the nature of her preparation for her adult life and the changes in her that were necessary to bring her to this point.

The young clergyman Archibald Tait, newly appointed Headmaster of Rugby School, courted Catharine Spooner during the spring of 1843. His letters, beginning as they do, 'my dearest darling love...', look to her as 'a partner who will share my cares and difficulties in a Christian spirit.'<sup>415</sup> But, in his journal, as we have seen, written on the morning of their wedding, he indicates his belief in her not just as a partner but as an influence for good, someone whose faith and goodness he considers much greater than his own:. If one considers how she was spending the very moment that he was making such an entry in his journal...

On her wedding morning she did not omit as usual to go to her mother's room to read to her the psalms and lessons of the day, (just as), in the busy midst of Rugby ,she attended the morning

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<sup>412</sup> Tait correspondence Vol 102 piece 216

<sup>413</sup> Tait correspondence Vol 102

<sup>414</sup> *ibid*

<sup>415</sup> *ibid*

service in the Parish Church before the labours of the day began; in her ordinary life and throughout all her sorrows the same high influence sustained her.<sup>416</sup>

then it is evident that her influence for good was couched in such a sense of self-discipline and that she would, indeed, be a good example. At the same time, however, she was aware of something additional and different which, now, she must add to her role: 'to always be with you and to share as far as possible all with you and to try and cheer you after the toil and labour of the day.'<sup>417</sup>

If this was Catharine's perception of the duties and demands of her forthcoming marriage, it is clear also that such a view of duty and calling was in the mind of her father too. She had fulfilled a very considerable role in his life, the last 'daughter at home' and his help and support, given the frailty of his never robust wife. After her marriage he felt her loss as he set out in a letter to her...

My dearest Catharine,

It is so long since I have written to you that I must now tell you, for fear you should forget it, that I do love you a little bit - that I do often as I sit solitary many hours in the Deanery rooms, miss you a little bit ...- but at all these times I can think of you as happy - as usefully fulfilling the duties of that station of life to which it has pleased God to call you and cheering the heart and home of an affectionate ... husband and then all selfish feeling vanishes.<sup>418</sup>

It is not clear from this whether the notion of 'calling' was that of wife or of wife of a clergyman and from the perspective of one so deeply versed in the 'rectory culture' of his day, it was probably hard to see any difference, but he too puts emphasis on the 'cheering' aspect of wifely duty which was clearly in Catharine's mind and which Archie Tait also looked forward to... 'This lovely spring day I have longed for you. But I am happy thinking of you and the time when, God willing, we shall be joined for ever.'<sup>419</sup>

Joined they were in July 1843 at Elmdon and Catharine took on the extended family which a boarding school Headmaster brings with him. These next early years of their marriage were, in her husband's view, the happiest of all their life together. There was

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<sup>416</sup> The Times October 3 1879 – Review of Randall Davidson and William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait

<sup>417</sup> Tait correspondence 1844 piece no 134

<sup>418</sup> *ibid*

no question that the Headmaster's new wife fitted well into the part. It was a new environment for her, having lived all her life in a parsonage, but she had a household to manage and a husband in a demanding job to care for. Almost at once she had stepped beyond these boundaries and established new ones, bringing the kind of charm and caring concern she had exercised in her father's parish to her husband's flock of boys, young men and masters, as well as to the community outside the school.

God gave her wonderfully good health, and a buoyant, cheerful nature.... At Rugby, a beautiful house of their own, with a pleasant garden, the green grass of the Close, and the old elms overshadowing it, congenial society, ample means, abundant occupation - all these outward circumstances were added to the charm of the freshness of her early married independence.<sup>420</sup>

That the occupation was abundant is evident from her husband's description of her daily programme. Her day began early with her own private reading and devotions before family prayers. She occupied herself with household and visitors, and then with poor people from the town, took lessons in German and read constantly in every available minute. Half-holiday afternoons were for her husband and, later in the day, they would meet with boys from the school or entertain them for tea. In the evenings there were also friends and colleagues to visit and to entertain, before closing the day with prayers, rarely before midnight.

Although her sister in law describes her as having no part in the management of Tait's boarding house, nevertheless, the pastoral care and concern for the boys of the house was within her remit and indeed she enjoyed the youthful company with which she was surrounded. The boys, in later life, retained happy memories of their headmaster's wife, A.G.Butler, for instance, later Bishop of Ely recalling....

I remember the deep impression she made on me by her grace and graciousness the first time I saw her at tea in your drawing room as a very little boy; and alas, later on .the distress and self-reproach when we made a noise one night and disturbed her when she was ill.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> *ibid*

<sup>420</sup> William Benham (1879) *Catharine and Craufurd Tait* p 18

<sup>421</sup> Tait Papers

The impression she made on a company of boys at a stage in their lives not renowned for sensitivity to others remained with many of them as is shown by letters received over thirty years later...

I am one of those whose memory retains very vividly impressions received in the beginning of 1843 when your Grace's happiness was so fresh and when as sixth-form boys - at least I can speak for myself - gained a most delightful experience of the exquisite kindness with which the wife of our Headmaster could second and support his constant efforts to befriend and help us in all ways open to him. We knew how bright and winning a presence was that which presided over the School House hospitality ...<sup>422</sup>

It was as if she had an early understanding of her role as comforter and supporter in time of trouble learned, from her own mother as a clergy wife.

Almost at once in their married life, Archibald Tait handed over the household accounts to his wife, quickly followed by those of his school house, and ultimately his general school accounts. She had a great ability in this field, which constantly confounded the various men who were to audit or handle financial matters in the many aspects of the Archbishop and his wife's activities. While her husband had no problem with entrusting a woman with matters of finance the same could not be said of other men of the time. Her brother in law, Sir Charles Wake, Tait describes as having a 'preconceived feeling that a lady's habits of business were not much to be trusted.'<sup>423</sup> As Tait's own career developed and his affairs became more complex, she was still able to render this service, adding to it her own enterprises, such as the St Peter's orphanage which she founded, and which, at her death, was to reveal everything entirely in order and up to date to the day of her departure from Lambeth a fortnight before. Even at Carlisle, when departing after the most tragic and traumatic few weeks of their lives, she was able to sit down and

...quietly took in hand the arrangement of the affairs of the poor women whose subscriptions to the Mothers' Club were in her keeping; she went through them all, placing every one's money with each little account to the proper name, so that there might be no mistake or loss.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> W B Whippel, Lower House of Convocation, Westminster 2.2.1879 Tait papers Vol 99 piece 50

<sup>423</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait

<sup>424</sup> *ibid* p 396

It might at this point be appropriate to consider the provenance of much of the material that supports this research. Inevitably in biographies of recently departed people written by those closest to them there is, on the one hand, the possibility of much personal detail and insight not available to a more distant (in time or proximity) biographer. The counter argument to this is, that such accounts are unlikely to be objective in their treatment of the subject and that distance (again in time or relationship), will afford a more clear and honest view. Furthermore, there is the contention that material written for inclusion in an historical thesis needs to be free of all possible influences of grief, sympathy or admiration. Much of the material about Catharine Tait is found in the writings of her widower, her family, both immediate and extended, and those employed by her husband as biographer and chaplain. It is clear that there is unlikely to be total objectivity in any of their accounts, and there has not been, since, a comprehensive biography of her. More recent historical or analytical commentaries on her life, such as Michael Wheeler's consideration of her Carlisle narrative in Heaven, Hell and the Victorians,<sup>425</sup> or the more distant (though still family) accounts in which she is a less prominent figure in Swinton and Sitwell's 1940 Two Generations,<sup>426</sup> though looking more critically, as in Wheeler, or less clouded by past tragedy in Swinton and Sitwell, do not, I think, change the perception given in the contemporary biographies. I would contend that there is a problem, here, in trying too hard to dismantle an image, one can lose the image entirely.

Catharine Tait was a good woman, who suffered considerable tragedy in her life but who, nevertheless, lived a full and impressive existence, both as a private individual in her own spiritual life, but also as a public figure as the wife of a prominent churchman.

It was three years after their marriage that their first child, Catty, was born and then followed almost at once the serious illness of her husband, struck down with rheumatic fever. ... 'one of those quick-gathering dark clouds which, at intervals, God has sent to overshadow my bright life.'<sup>427</sup> Here was the first call to uphold a loved one in time of sickness ready to pray with him and aid his recovery with helpful texts and hymns. To maintain her own strength she called upon the words in Isaiah 1,v10. 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyed the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness,

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<sup>425</sup>Michael Wheeler(1994) Heaven, Hell and the Victorians.

<sup>426</sup>Georgiana Swinton and Sir O.SITWELL (1940) Two Generations

<sup>427</sup>William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait

and hath no light?'.<sup>428</sup> But for Archie Tait the light was Catharine and she made sure hers shone, thereby concealing her anxiety and willing her weakened husband to greater strength and recovery. An extensive holiday did much to restore him. The births of their second and third children May and Craufurd followed and then came Lord John Russell's offer of the Deanery at Carlisle.

Their departure from Rugby was a grand occasion with the boys removing the horses from the Tait's carriage and pulling it down to the station themselves. Although there had been some controversy about Tait's handling of the post of Headmaster, following as he did someone of the immense popularity and influence of Dr Arnold, nevertheless, there were many who welcomed his fresh and unprejudiced approach to the position and who found his lack of experience in such a role to be no problem. There was certainly no question in the minds of the boys of School House about their sadness at the departure of their Headmaster's wife...

Dear Mrs Tait,

It is a poor consolation amid the sorrow occasioned by your approaching departure, to tell you how deeply we shall miss you when you have gone away from us. For, although we hope and confidently trust this change may be determined for the best, yet we cannot forget that we lose in you a tried friend both in sickness and in health, one who has sympathised with our amusements and watched our progress with an anxious and friendly eye.

Your affectionate young friends of the School House<sup>429</sup>

This first step up the ladder of preferment within the church brought with it the kind of challenges Catharine may have had in mind when she spoke, during her courtship, of future trial and danger. Carlisle was a rough place, an impoverished garrison town. The influence of the previous Dean had not penetrated much into the vice and misery which surrounded the comfortable seclusion of the Deanery.<sup>430</sup> This was not the Tait's way. The new Dean took his first clerical appointment very seriously and his wife balanced the demands of a growing family with the requirements of a clergy wife, working among the

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<sup>429</sup> Tait papers piece no 234 March 1850

<sup>430</sup> The city was in the process of acknowledging its own failings in matters of disease, sanitation and public health as is evident from a survey published in the city. Robert ROWLINSON (1850) Report to the General



poor, setting up schemes for their help and improvement, keeping abreast of her own reading and above all supporting and taking an interest in the work her husband had undertaken, the 'Mary' in her sitting at his feet while the 'Martha' made sure that visitors to the Deanery were well cared for. She was being all she had set out to be and he, in turn, was receiving all that he could have asked. However, something more was to be asked of them...a call upon their inner resources of greater magnitude than they could have imagined, made all the more awful by the possibility that the sickness that proceeded to wipe out five of their seven children may have been brought into the family by themselves as they continued their round of sick visiting in the city. Indeed, in her own narrative she commented on the dangers they were aware of even as they first arrived in the city...

We went (to Carlisle) with rather anxious hearts, as we heard that scarlet fever was bad in the town; still it was the path of duty, and we felt we ought not to shrink from it.<sup>431</sup>

Scarlet fever was rife in Carlisle and through the autumn of 1855 the Dean and his wife worked hard to bring comfort to the distressed. They were then called to Ireland and returned just before Christmas to be reunited with their young family and to await the birth of their seventh child in the spring. Much of Catharine's time was taken up in the rearing and educating of her children but she did have the addition of a nurse, Mrs Peach, and her assistant Miss Golding, to help her and, with the assistance of Catty, the eldest daughter, the daily routines of the nursery had been established. Catharine describes her plans for how Catty's role would have developed: '...this dear girl who we had fondly hoped would so soon have taken her place beside us in all the duties and business of our life.'<sup>432</sup>

But, notwithstanding this aspiration for what might seem heavy responsibility at a very young age, her sister-in-law, Lady Wake, is full of praise for the manner in which her nephew and nieces were brought up: 'Mrs Tait has the talent of thus blending the

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Board of Health, Preliminary Enquiry into the sewage, drainage and supply of water and the sanitary conditions of the inhabitants of Carlisle.

<sup>431</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 256

<sup>432</sup> *ibid* p 366

children's' life with that of their parents and their friends without making them little bores.<sup>433</sup>

Being brought up in a clergy family, the offices and routines of the church year were part of an understanding of daily life, just as family worship was a feature of many Victorian middle class homes. The children had a good repertoire of favourite hymns and a collection of books and pictures. Their familiarity with the Prayer Book as well as the Bible was inevitable, but its importance was underlined as the children called upon these resources when this dark period came upon them.

The first child to suffer was Chatty whose symptoms followed immediately after the birth of their new sister Lucy in February.. This was a double torment for Mrs Tait, being caught up in the first days of a new baby just when she would expect to be nursing her sick daughter. Reassured that the baby would be safe from the contagion, and due to the illness of the older servant who would have been in charge, Lucy was confided to the care of a young and inexperienced nursery maid, her mother returning to her only to feed her and then back to the bedside of her daughters. The sickness was unremitting. Each of the girls, in turn, suffered the fever, the nausea and the indignity of having their long hair shorn. Always there was hope that the others might escape, that their own illness might not prove fatal, that even yet they might recover. Baby Lucy's baptism they followed from the Prayer Book and gazed from the tall windows of the Deanery. Here began the 'first dark days of nothingness'. After Susan's death came Catty, the eldest child's tenth birthday, like every event in this terrible calendar, celebrated with all the pain and poignancy imaginable. Although only ten years old, all the descriptions are of an older child, a rock and comfort to her parents and the onset of whose sickness was the heaviest burden to bear.

It was Easter and they followed the Easter services, remembering how in previous years they had celebrated Palm Sunday and Easter Day together, and now grateful for the uplifting and comforting routine of the liturgy, as the days passed on, bringing more inevitable suffering. They were, by this time, living life in four separate camps, the Dean, carrying on with his work and attending, one by one, the funerals of his daughters; Craufurd removed to the caring household of a friend, Catharine nursing her baby and

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<sup>433</sup> A C Bickley (1883) *A Sketch of the Life of A C Tait* p 185

returning to the ever diminishing company of the nursery with their faithful attendants, each bearing the twin burdens of sadness and fear. The bedside vigils brought great tiredness and the additional agony of witnessing each other's pain. Catty herself tried to comfort her grieving parents, and Catharine tried to protect her from the pain of seeing her father cry. What is so evident, and probably not remarkable, is their constant reference to the sustaining support of the Everlasting Arms and their looking to a great reunion with those sisters gone before. Because the progress of the illness was unrelenting, and the demands of the newborn baby unavoidable, the routine of daily life was maintained where possible but, when May died on April 8<sup>th</sup> there only remained seven year old Craufurd to be reunited with his mother and to greet his tiny sister.

We know of this catalogue of sad events because Catharine set them down almost immediately after. It was her way of dealing with such a tragedy. It would have made very hard reading at any time. Even to a stranger over a century later, it is a moving if inspiring narrative. But there is no bitterness in it. It records events, fears, hopes and sadness, but it also carries a strong commitment to the belief in the afterlife and a firm conviction that the life to come is not to be feared, but to be rejoiced in. In writing to a friend, Mrs Wordsworth, she comments:

As yet we hardly realise their exceeding blessedness, our agony is too deep for that, and consequently, deadens our faith; but in His own good time God will strengthen us if we wait upon Him, as we will strive to do.<sup>434</sup>

Archie, in his own prayer diary reflects 'Oh, Lord, thou hast dealt very mysteriously with us'.<sup>435</sup> It would appear to have been Catharine's intention to keep this account to herself during her lifetime, except that it might prove comforting to some in similar circumstances - it was certainly not published until after her death. What we do know is that she did not read it to her husband until a year after the tragedy when she comments: '... he seemed able to bear it and though it was full of agony to us both, it seemed a comfort.'<sup>436</sup>

When it was eventually published, after her death in 1879, Archie was Archbishop of Canterbury and had to decide whether to include it in the biography being written of his

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<sup>434</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 403

<sup>435</sup> A C Bickley (1883) Life of A C Tait p 190

<sup>436</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 403

late wife and son. Ultimately, he made up his mind to go ahead, but what he did not foresee was the effect the publication of the memoirs would have on the public who read them and the influence his wife would continue to wield long after her death. Yet among all these expressions of personal acquaintance there appears a letter dated December 29<sup>th</sup> 1879 (the memoirs were published in 1879 and reviewed in The Times on October 3<sup>rd</sup>). The letter is from an address in Liverpool:

*45 Deanes Road*

*Fairfield, Liverpool*

*My Lord Archbishop,*

*I have been called upon by our Heavenly Father, to part with four dearly beloved children through scarlet fever, and I am now left childless. My great grief and the knowledge that your grace has been similarly afflicted must be my apology for addressing you, for the purpose of asking you if you will favour me with a copy of this book written at this time and which so many known and unknown sympathising correspondents have recommended me to read as being calculated to afford my stricken heart some consolation. I append particulars of the deaths from a daily paper and am your humble servant,*

*Sarah. M. Jones*

.....  
JONES Dec. 13 at Deane Road, Fairfield  
aged 6 years Percy;  
Dec. 15 aged 3 years Willie;  
Dec. 16 aged 5 years Frank;  
and Dec. 17 aged 1 year 4 months Gertrude Helen  
the children of T.B. Jones.<sup>437</sup>

At the top of the letter is written in pencil in the Archbishop's hand: 'Book sent 31 Dec. 1879'.<sup>438</sup>

If Archbishop Tait had wondered about the publication of the memoirs, he must surely, at this point, have concluded that it would have been wrong to have done otherwise.

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<sup>437</sup> Tait papers 99 piece 346

Following on from its publication came numerous demands, some via Macmillan the publisher, but others direct, for permission to reproduce a cheaper version, or simply the Carlisle experience as it would be ‘so largely a blessing to the labouring classes under similar bereavement’. The Editor of the Girls’ Own Paper produced by the Religious Tract Society sought permission for a copy of Mrs Tait’s portrait.<sup>439</sup> By spring of the next year Macmillan were asking permission to reproduce the Carlisle narrative in French.

What Catharine Tait achieved in her lifetime was immense but it was a Bristol Congregational minister who summed up the legacy of her writing; ‘Your sainted wife is fulfilling a ministry of consolation and loving resignation to the Father who asked of her her child.’

There is an element of Tait’s thinking that needs to find a place at this point in the narrative. At various times in his own writing, there are references to his response to the idea of his own advancement and ambition. He was not unaware of his own ability, he was well spoken of by all those who had encountered him in the academic world at Oxford, he had come through the totally new experience of leading a public school relatively unscathed in reputation - the only lasting ill-effects being diminished good health. He was not unaware of his own ambitious nature, even at the very start of his working life, having newly been appointed to the Headship of Rugby, he had written in his diary:

Now I may look forward to dedicate my whole life to one object,  
the grand work of Christian education..... Banish all indolence.  
Give me freedom from worldly ambition.<sup>440</sup>

However, in a notebook labelled Private Memorandum written while at Carlisle in the spring of 1856 he exhibits considerable soul-searching about his ambitious nature and his desire for power, status and wealth:

‘O Lord, If there be in my lot some discouragements let me think  
of the far greater comforts and blessings - truly thou has caused  
my cup to overflow - a loving wife and dear children, improved

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<sup>438</sup> *ibid*

<sup>439</sup> *ibid*

<sup>440</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1891) Life of A C Tait p 113

health, means sufficient far beyond most of my contemporaries, a good house, ample leisure...<sup>441</sup>

and yet he follows this catalogue of good gifts with the anxiety that 'a feeling some dissatisfaction has been creeping over me.' These questions had dominated his life on more than one occasion and had probably been brought to a head at the death of the Bishop of Carlisle when there might have been a possibility of his promotion. This was not to be, but to be fair, he had been Dean for six years, he was forty-five, he had accomplished a great deal at Carlisle and could see himself by-passed in a Northern backwater so far from the intellectual stimulation of Oxford or the day to day lively activity of Rugby. He probably was ready to move on. He had been involved in the University Commission and, indeed, Lord John Russell had 'made no secret of his wish to recommend him for a bishopric.'<sup>442</sup> However, the last entry in this little book being on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the death of Chatty, the first of his daughters to die being March 6<sup>th</sup> the marginal note in his own hand tells its own sad irony.

And before another entry was made in this book there followed our great calamity - Chatty, Susie, Frances, Catty, May - taken away from us- Craufurd and the newborn Lucy alone left. When I look back now, these 9 years, reading these memoranda, on this day (Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February 1865) what lessons do they teach and what changes at Carlisle were then.'<sup>443</sup>

The terrible irony was that it was the publicity surrounding the death of their daughters, which had prompted Queen Victoria to recommend his being given the See of London. This must have tormented him, and one can only imagine what must have been his thoughts nine, years later, on rediscovering the notebook and adding his comment. What we do not know is how private these notes were, and to what extent Catharine was privy to his concern about his advancement. True, her life in Carlisle had been principally involved in bringing up their children but, having staff to call upon, she had also been able to take on the social and charity work which she had always seen as part of her life, both in Elmdon and Rugby, in addition to the entertaining role demanded of the wife of a senior clergyman in a Cathedral community. That she supported him in all his ventures was never in doubt, but it is to be wondered what would have been her

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<sup>441</sup> Tait papers Private Memorandum 1856

<sup>442</sup> W H Freemantle Dictionary of National Biography 1898 p 292-9

<sup>443</sup> Tait papers, Private Memorandum 1856 (marginal note 1865)

response to his anxiety and his yearning for the trappings of high office. He does half acknowledge that her view might be different from his: '...like my dear wife, I hope I have no wishes but that Thy Holy Will may be fulfilled.'<sup>444</sup> It would seem that he saw what was to happen, not just in terms of his own calling but as something to be undertaken together. Was he, with hindsight, alluding to clouds and silver linings...

God was preparing both my wife and me for a great change of life, a far more extended field of work than we had before known, and fresh great blessings, which for 20 years she enjoyed with the keenest sense of gratitude tempered by the solemn thoughts which this trial had fixed within her heart.<sup>445</sup>

Nevertheless, his advancement had been secured and there was no doubt that the Queen had been instrumental in bringing it about and directing Lord Palmerston to offer the appointment. 'The story went about that the queen had spoken of the new Bishop as one who, 'having been tried by such deep sorrow, would be qualified to deal with the troubles which afflicted the Church.'<sup>446</sup>

The challenge of the See of London was something Carlisle had done little to prepare the Tait for and indeed, Archie once again was going against precedent in that he was the first man for two hundred years to become Bishop of London without any previous Episcopal experience. His unsuitability for the post was noted by The Daily News which commented: '(he) seems to want calmness, steadiness, consistency, patience and endurance... almost as much devoid of pastoral as of Episcopal experience.'<sup>447</sup>

He was also without the support of either of the main clerical parties, since neither felt that, sympathetic and fair minded though he may be, he could be relied on to represent their particular cause. That was, after all, the reason for his appointment, his non-alignment being his virtue. He had little sympathy with doctrinal detail or ceremonial, but a strong desire to reach judicious and appropriate settlements to the matters that came before him. His efforts in the House of Lords earned him respect and sympathy as he laboured to bring such settlements about and, as the next few years were to demonstrate, his desire and ability to involve himself first-hand in the problems and

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<sup>444</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 186

<sup>445</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson Life of AC Tait p 56

<sup>446</sup> The Times 3.10.1879 – Review of Catharine and Craufurd Tait

<sup>447</sup> The Daily News (n/d) 1856 (newspaper cutting in Tait papers)

distress of others separated him, and inevitably Catharine, from the common perception of high-ranking clergy.

The Taites were, indeed, surrounded once again by the effects of poverty as in any large city, but this time it was the metropolis and it had its own particular problems. The immense growth of the capital, its influx of immigrants, of dispossessed people from across Europe, and fortune-seeking men and women from the impoverished countryside to work in the small industries and service trades of the fast-growing city, meant that the parish structure as it existed in rural England would no longer serve. If the church was to support the new communities of the fast-growing cities, particularly London, then particular measures would have to be taken. It was with this in mind that it was resolved to build ten new churches and to set up new parishes to accommodate London's growing population. It was critical that the church should not miss this opportunity and the Bishop of London was at its forefront, setting up in 1857, the Diocesan Home Mission and preaching himself in ragged schools, in Covent Garden Market and to the gypsies on Shepherd's Bush Green. In addition to the planning and outreach that it was necessary for the church to accomplish, it was also important not to neglect the clergy who were so necessary for its accomplishment.

To assist with this was part of Catharine's role - it was already established that the London clergy and their wives should be welcome at Fulham Palace but, with the special touch of the Bishop's wife and his young family, these visits took on a greater charm and spontaneity. There were a thousand London clergy and the Palace and its grounds were open to them on very many occasions. The Bishop's wife had her role, too, in the outreach - not in the establishment of the new churches but in the mission to the population they served. London, as a city, harboured every sort of problem and distress and it was to address some of these problems that Catharine set up the 'Ladies' Diocesan Association' - it 'came to her one night' and she straightaway set about recruiting 'honourable women not a few'<sup>448</sup> from among the wealthy and the willing with whom her position brought her into contact.

It was indeed her position which was her entree into the society of the highest and lowest in the community. Inevitably her elevated social position brought with it contacts with the



rich and powerful, but they were often powerless to enter the other worlds which her situation as a clergy wife allowed her to penetrate. Archie's biographer was clear that she did fulfil something extra in the manner in which she carried out her duties:

Such a woman, under a Bishop, might more effectively gain entrance for Christian visitation and kindly sympathetic influences into some of the workhouses and hospitals in which a shrinking from such assistance had hitherto been manifested by the authorities.<sup>449</sup>

Being the wife of a bishop carried with it extra responsibilities but it did not exclude the basic social duties and interaction with the poor and the needy that had always been a feature of her life both as a wife and as a daughter. Was she fulfilling knowingly the requirement in the service for the Consecration of Bishops: 'Will you show yourself gentle, and be merciful for Christ's sake to poor and needy people and to all strangers destitute of health?'<sup>450</sup>

In fact Benham continues, in his consideration of her wholehearted assumption of her role as Bishop's wife, that 'she felt that others might hang back if she, in her prominent position were afraid.'<sup>451</sup> As a mother, she extended this dutiful requirement to her own daughters, so that responding to the needs of those in distress became 'what they did'.

The little girls were taught early to help and care for those around them, and young as they were, regular visits were soon made to the Fulham Workhouse. Edith's special duty on these occasions was to read to the old ladies, who, in their turn had often to help her out with the long words.<sup>452</sup>

As Benham describes their childhood so the children themselves described it in their own journals...

'And then visiting the old Almshouse women when Edie (so sweet) used to read to old Mrs King who frightened us all out of our wits with her big nose and her man's voice; and the blind man we used to take messes to, and the old man with the palsy... and the visits to the Workhouse on Sunday afternoons...where

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<sup>448</sup> The Clerical World January 25<sup>th</sup> 1882

<sup>449</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1881) Life of A C Tait p 71

<sup>450</sup> Book of Common Prayer

<sup>451</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1881) Life of A C Tait p 73

<sup>452</sup> Mary Mills (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth p 10

she (Edith) and I shared a ward and Lucy and Craufurd had one each.<sup>453</sup>

This commitment was so much an underlying part of their lives that it never left them. Craufurd was keen to take holy orders, but first to satisfy his desire to travel abroad and widen his horizons. This done, he began his new life as first of all chaplain to his father, then curate at Saltwood and finally in his own parish in Notting Hill but his parochial work still found him visiting the poor and sick, and in some way grateful for the entree an epidemic gave him in overcoming his natural shyness and allowing him to continue to be useful. It is strange that, although he found visiting the sick a fundamental requirement, he had not the ease to accomplish it that his sisters found. On the other hand, for him it was something he did alongside the work he was called to do. For them it was the work they were called to do. Their preparation, during their growing years, was for a continuance of a good and holy life and they were brought up, as young women of their station, to continue serving God whether as single women or as wives and mothers. Theirs was not the sort of society which would have countenanced a career, marriage was of course possible, but an alternative source of service and satisfaction would have to come from work in the community and support for their parents in their calling. (see figure 5).

The education of the girls was at home, though, even with the assistance of governesses, 'was not so complete as would be received nowadays'.<sup>454</sup> It is interesting that Edith, in her biography, written in 1938, chooses to mention this and to express some surprise that their father, particularly, did not seem overly concerned for the education of his daughters. There is here a clear demonstration of the difference in parental expectation. At thirteen Craufurd was sent to Eton and then to Oxford (though he spent much of his vacation time reading with his mother, to whom he attributed his 'First' in history). He was able to fulfil all he sought in terms of travel, apprenticeship as a curate and a clear career path. There seems to be no consideration of any such path for any of the daughters. It is to be wondered whether, if the 'first' family had survived, any plans would have been made for their continued education, particularly Catty the eldest, and so much her mother's support, cast even at the age of 10 as pupil teacher in the

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<sup>453</sup> Agnes's journal quoted in Edith Davidson of Lambeth p 16



**Figure 5. Edith, Lucy and Agnes Tait**

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<sup>454</sup> Mary Mills (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth (Edith was 10 when her father became Archbishop and

early education of the other children. That all the women in his household upheld and supported him in his work and his increasing infirmity is evident. He records himself that, following the death of his wife, Agnes (Aggie) took on the task of writing his journal. Such volumes were therefore not totally private but there were others that were undoubtedly not for publication.

Having had so much evidence of their mother's influence over them, It was interesting to discover, in reading Lucy Tait's diaries in her adult years, that the influence of her father is also clearly seen. A feature of Archie Tait's journals and prayer diaries was a preoccupation with what we would call 'time management' - noting how much time in each day was spent in prayer ... 'twenty minutes before breakfast, ten minutes after lunch, another fifteen in the evening'. It was a record that came and went but he obviously tried hard to adhere to it. Lucy, in turn records in exactly the same way - shorter lengths of time - blocks of five minutes mostly, but also with comments on the quality of prayer and, not unlike her father also, notes of self-recrimination and self-reproach such that it is a very uncomfortable experience to read these diaries and makes one feel, in a way, disloyal in commenting upon them. On the other hand, for such a method of organising prayer to be so similar, it must indicate that Lucy either saw her father's diaries or they discussed the issue of allocating time in a busy day for prayer and reflection. Archie Tait may not have been so divorced from the 'framing and fashioning' of his daughters as we might have imagined.

Catharine's thirst for education was insatiable. She read constantly, widely and improvingly. She encouraged guests to read aloud or share books with her. She and her husband read together and in his later years his daughters read to him. Nor was the nature of their reading limited to 'holy' works. Both Archie and Catharine read the fathers of the English church and endless works of theology and but they also read vast quantities of history, both British and foreign, and quantities of novels. Margaret Oliphant was a particular favourite of Archie in his later years but between them there were differences in taste. It is remarked that at Oxford he and his colleague Ward were 'equally intolerant of poetry.' Catharine however, loved poetry and was always learning it and encouraging others to do likewise. The girls too read from an early age, to each

other, to visitors, to their parents and to the old ladies of the Workhouse and the hospital. This was reading both for pleasure and for spiritual enrichment. There is no record in any of the biographies of disapproval - though in their childhood there would have been ‘Sunday books’ - but always this constant thirst for knowledge. But to what end? To the end of creating the fully rounded person, the whole woman? Was it indeed part of the ‘framing and fashioning’ for the lives they lead and the company they would inevitably keep?

The visitors at Fulham and Lambeth were aware of the warm and welcoming atmosphere that was so much a family home. Therefore, meals shared and strolls round the gardens would involve conversation and, even when not joining in, listening and absorbing the views and experiences of a wide range of British and overseas clerics and other dignitaries. Archie Tait was an academic and did not abandon this facet of his life when clerical preferment came upon him for he was involved deeply in University reform as well as the academic and theological debates which raged throughout his Episcopate and Primacy. Yet he did not exclude his wife from his deliberations but involved her whenever he was writing a paper or preparing for a debate, valuing always her opinion: ‘Sometimes... when I was engaged in writing some article or lecture, in which she would take an intense interest and for which she was ever at hand to help me with my reading.’<sup>455</sup>

Strangely, in P T Marsh’s study of Tait’s primacy The Victorian Church in Decline, he describes what would appear a much more ‘separate spheres’ approach to her involvement: ‘Tait did not usually discuss his ecclesiastical dealings with her,’<sup>456</sup> but I think it would have been difficult not to have done so. Inevitably, seeking refuge at the end of a gruelling day or a succession of meetings, one could understand that to rehearse the days arguments and decisions would hardly be desirable. There is much said that contributes to the idea of Catharine providing a soothing and relaxing home as antidote to the extreme trials and pressures of the day’s work. It is the role adopted most readily by a majority of clergy wives, wives, and other supportive women when providing a home for partner engaged in stressful work. It is quite understandable that there would

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<sup>455</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1881) Life of A C Tait p 51

<sup>456</sup> P T Marsh (1969) The Victorian Church in Decline. Archibald Tait and the Church of England 1868-1882.. p 54.

be matters that were confidential (the confidentiality of the confessional is not, after all the sole prerogative of the Roman church). There would also have been issues which affected the family in the 'business' which was what the clergy family did as their daily work – the arrangement of social functions, charity events, campaigns and entertaining which would be predominately 'managed' by Catharine and which would constitute undoubtedly her 'sphere' but within which her husband might have had an interest. But there was certainly also, in days of extended visiting and extended families, a great deal of activity into which the Archbishop could and did involve himself, again as an antidote to the pressures of the day.

However, this said, there is much that supports my perception that Catharine was not excluded from ecclesiastical affairs, based on remarks made in both Archie's writing and that of other biographers, and it was certainly not the perception of his colleagues when they approached her, as an intermediary between themselves and her husband.

Because of the absence of much of the 'out' correspondence however, we do not know in what manner she responded to these requests but we are aware, from other quotes that she did her best to protect him from intrusion and to try to limit or distance those requests which might cause him additional anxiety. This does indicate that Catharine was able to operate a filter system, undoubtedly alongside his chaplains and other staff and this, requiring discretion, also implies a degree of knowledge permitting informed decisions about who and what to allow or limit. From all that Archie wrote about his wife, in his correspondence and in her biography, there is a clear indication that he valued her judgement and her intellect. It was certainly the perception of the writer of the Tait entry in the Dictionary of National Biography:

Mrs Tait's force of character and sympathy strengthened every part of her husband's work; her beauty and her social power made his home attractive. She entered into the difficult problems of his work as a bishop, tempering tough not deflecting his judgement, while her deep piety, simple tastes, love of literature, and care for the poor, made the home of the prelate akin to that of all classes of his clergy.<sup>457</sup>

It was a relationship of perfect trust, from the confiding of his accounts to her in the early days of their marriage, through the fierce and often acrimonious theological battles of his

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<sup>457</sup> Dictionary of National Biography

days in Fulham and Lambeth, to the sharing of sadness and tragic news. He did not so much concede his wife's ability to compete on equal terms so much as to take it for granted, and yet there is the criticism of his daughter Edith that he did not seem to take as much interest in the education of his daughters as she might have expected. Could it have been that his wife was not to him 'women'?

The Fulham incumbency marked a new start in the family life of the Tait family and the immense changes it involved were probably therapeutic to a family so shell-shocked by the tragedy that had befallen them. The Bishop of London's role was immense and wide-ranging and required the support of a household and a wife but Catharine, at the same time still had the baby Lucy and the seven year old Craufurd to nurture and encourage. By the time Craufurd went away to Eton, two further sisters, Edith and Agnes, had been born.

If the external life of the Fulham Palace family was concerned with the challenges to the Church of the growth and poverty of the Metropolis, and the Episcopal life of Archie Tait dominated by issues of ritual and legality, the more domestic domain was ruled by the demands of education and social training. Catharine never had to manage the upbringing of her children entirely on her own. She had always had servants and, in this second family, governesses to assist with their educational progress. That she continued the quest for education on into her own life, that of her husband, her staff, her multitudinous visiting cousins, nieces and nephews and even such house guests as came 'on business', was part of her understanding of life and her total belief in the community of the home. Her obsession with reading was not so that she should withdraw from company but rather that all the company should share good things together. Throughout her life she took on the responsibility for the spiritual and educational nurture of her maids, preparing them for confirmation and for employment in other households, spreading good practice, as well as religious observance and knowledge. Guests were encouraged to read poetry, as one of her nieces remembered:

... she made me read Arnold's 'Rome' to her every day as I had no governess there. She used always to be reading scraps of poetry, and made me especially fond of Trench's Poems which she gave me, and much of which she could say by heart.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> William Benham (1879) *Catharine and Craufurd Tait* p236

The social aspect of the life at Fulham concerned itself much with the duties and pleasures of entertaining and visiting. Entertainment took place on both a grand and a more modest scale. The guest lists and visitors' books for their residences alternate between notes of 'Family 3 ' or 'Family, 3 Sitwells, 1 Wake' to entries such as February 15<sup>th</sup> 1865 which records' Catharine Gladstone, Llandaff, Ely, Gloucester, Bangor, Archdeacon of Leicester, Dean of Canterbury, Headmaster of Charterhouse'<sup>459</sup>

There were also family meals when Archie would join the assembled women and children, and even rare occasions when he and Catharine dined alone: 'Mrs Tait used to tell a story of herself and her husband having once dined alone at Fulham and of the increased appetites so singular a circumstance gave them.'<sup>460</sup> There were days of open house or parties for the London clergy and their wives, garden fetes and celebrations for the old women of the Workhouse or the Retired Governesses and much grander events to accommodate the British and foreign representatives at the Synod or Lambeth Conference. These Visitors' books, while listing bishops and statesmen alongside family and more modest clergy and politicians, also include the occasional royal signature.

The visiting aspect of their lives was that which had been with them always, the need to be involved in the comfort and relieving of the distress of those about them, in the hospitals, workhouse and the poor courts and alleys of inner London. Wherever they lived, poverty was on their doorstep and Catharine was not able to ignore it. However, just as in Carlisle the enormity of the demand became totally overwhelming, so despite her hard work with the Women' Diocesan Association and her own parish visiting there was to come a great, but fortunately in this case, less personal demand on all their resources. The cholera morbus had been a summer visitor to the capital for some years, since its importation into Britain from the far East, via Russia and Germany, in 1832. By 1854, it had been recognised as being water –borne, but the poor conditions of inner London meant that prevention of its return was hampered, and in 1866 yet another virulent epidemic gripped the capital. It was recognised that the proportions of this visitation were such, that ordinary measures would be insufficient for its containment. The clergy formed bands of workers with lay and professional men and women. A weary

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<sup>459</sup> Tait Papers Visitors' Book for Fulham Palace



Archie Tait was preparing to leave town for his summer vacation and recuperation but neither he nor Catharine felt they could leave the metropolis in such affliction. There was nothing for it but to join with the clergy and lay workers and involve themselves in the caring for the sick. Visiting was an obvious requirement, not only for the sick (many of whom were well past caring how eminent their visitors might be) but also for their relatives and, even more, for the support and encouragement of the workers who struggled to contain this disease and its effects and aftermath. Tait also did what he knew best how to do:

He preached on the duty of preparing for death, and afterwards gave practical advice on dealing with disease, warning people that it was a mockery to pray to God for relief, if the proper use of health measures was neglected<sup>461</sup>

He described, himself, his wife's contribution

...my dear wife accompanied me regularly in the visits which I made to the infected districts...I can see her now standing in one of the large wards of the hospital for Wapping or St George in the East, quietly soothing the sufferers...<sup>462</sup>

This work became, as her husband described it, 'the crowning labour of her life'<sup>463</sup> Her next step, after visiting and learning alongside Archie of the extent and the nature of the problems, was to write to the press, and on August 10<sup>th</sup> 1866 the following letter appeared in The Times:

Sir,

I should feel greatly obliged if you would give publicity to the following announcement by the insertion of this letter in your columns. Donations in kind on behalf of the poor suffering through the present visitation of cholera will be thankfully received at the House of Charity, 1 Greek Street, Soho,. The articles most desired as likely to be the most useful are sheets, blankets, old linen, clothing of all kinds including black clothes, whether old or new, tea, arrowroot, sago or wine. Parcels should be addressed to 'Mrs Tait...'<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> A C Bickley (1883) A Sketch of the Life of A C Tait p 77

<sup>461</sup> M J Peel (1989) The London Episcopate of Archibald Campbell Tait King's College London. PhD p 208

<sup>462</sup> Mary Mills (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth p 11

<sup>463</sup> *ibid*

<sup>464</sup> The Times 10.8.1866

Taking an active role in this campaign was important for Catharine. On the one hand, it allowed the Bishop's household to have a high profile while, given Archie's physical frailty, permitting her to relieve him of some of the burden and thus protect him from too great an involvement. But also it enabled her to engage with other women, not just as she had already done in her involvement with the clergy wives, or the society ladies of the Women's Diocesan Association, but with women in leadership and management roles. She was able to use her position, undoubtedly, but also her skills of organisation and planning, alongside women of similar inclination and ability. Such involvement did not pass unnoticed; as was commented in the press 'no badge or vainly becoming hood or girdle is to mark those who enlist with Mrs Tait and Mrs Gladstone.'<sup>465</sup>

It also brought her into working contact with women of the Sisterhood movements. There was significance in this, too, for these groups of women had found themselves very much courted or shunned by either side of the religious spectrum of the time. The same article in the Daily Telegraph which so praised the involvement of the Diocesan Women's Association had also pointed out that the Church of England had not been in the vanguard of female service in this field: 'We have left it too long to the Church of Rome to fight the beautiful battles of Christianity with Christian Amazons.'<sup>466</sup> In their nursing and caring role, any alignment was able to be set aside in the face of the importance of their skills and the people and the churches' need. It was significant, therefore, that the Bishop of London was prepared to ask in all humility: 'God knows we need their help, if they will give it in the way our Church approves.'<sup>467</sup>

It became a step towards the recognition of religious sisterhoods. Catharine, had a cousin, Harriet Monsall, who was the first Mother Superior of the Clewer Order and who would have been glad to have encouraged such a recognition after a period of some ostracism and hostility. That Catharine's husband could make moves towards the sisterhoods, was not only noticed but attributed to her influence: as an entry in Mann's (1854) background material to the Religious Census commented:

(ACT)... married Catharine Spooner, a woman who was to prove herself a tower of strength to him, as she lovingly fulfilled her

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<sup>465</sup> Daily Telegraph 14.3.1867

<sup>466</sup> ibid

<sup>467</sup> M J Peel (1989) The London Episcopate of A C Tait

wifely duties and kept her own counsel on religious matters, her sympathies being with the Tractarians.<sup>468</sup>

Catharine could visit the sick in the cholera wards alongside her husband or without him, (had she not been doing this all her life, and already encouraging her children to do likewise in the hospital and workhouse nearby?). She could also identify needs and prepare to meet them by the organisation of collection centres and the deployment of staff to handle and distribute. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the coming together of high-profile and highly motivated women such as Catherine Marsh, Catherine Gladstone and Louisa Twining (prominent in workhouse reform) formed a spearhead to co-ordinate some of the aftercare for the victims of the epidemic. All these women used similar methods: they called upon the contacts of their field, be it the church, social work or politics as well as the general public, to respond to the needs of their fellow Londoners. They used the media through their letters and through publications such as Catherine Marsh's Death and Life, a record of the cholera wards in the London Hospital. Public awareness of medical realities was vital and approached by many in the need to encourage good practice and attempt disease prevention, to support the overstretched health professionals (and augment the vast army of volunteer and lay assistants) and to provide the basic requirements of the sick and their families as described in Catharine's letter. Money was also needed, since the death or incapacity of adult wage earners would be disastrous for families. There was also the shortage of beds and the need for a place for convalescence, in order to free up space in hospital. There was also an additional consequence of the epidemic - the large number of orphan children finding themselves alive, but destitute, in an unhealthy city. It was this that Catharine saw as being an urgent requirement that would involve a long-term commitment. As a result, she rented a house in Fulham and set up a temporary orphanage to house a number of girls left destitute by the cholera. At the same time, Louisa Twining took on a concern for the provision of convalescent homes, Mrs Gladstone set up an orphanage for boys and Catherine Marsh, an establishment for mothers and babies. They were all well known and respected within their existing circles but this was a step beyond, for they were establishing something that would endure beyond the present emergency and for which capital and continuing revenue would need to be raised.

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<sup>468</sup> Mann (1854) Call to London p 13

Once such a challenge was taken up, it had to be carried through or innocent people would suffer. Inevitably, being women with connections, they had recourse to people of means and ability to assist in the running of their establishments; but also, being women of high profile, they had much to lose in terms of reputation should they fail or their drive diminish. Catharine was not one to take on a challenge she could not fulfil. It is recorded that there were many ventures she was drawn to on her arrival in London but she determined to pursue only those in which there was some chance of her being able to continue and to make a real contribution. She saw no value in spreading herself thinly, just for the sake of giving her name and little more.<sup>469</sup>

Her daughter Edith records, in her biography, that she and her sisters were, though only small children, involved in the setting up of the Fulham home and became firm friends with many of the new residents who became 'almost a part of the Bishop's household'<sup>470</sup>, and indeed Catharine's role in the Home remained much more than just an organiser. She could not be in day to day charge but she taught the little girls their hymns and bible stories and made them welcome as playmates to her own children. Indeed, Edith and Lucy retained their interest and involvement throughout their lives and the orphanage itself moved from Fulham to a property on land owned by the Taits at Broadstairs, so that, once again, it became a neighbouring concern when the family (or rather Archie) was translated to Canterbury. Catharine remained all her life deeply involved, handling financial and property matters as well as having concern for the well-being of the girls and the staff. She engaged staff who were in charge, but the orphanage was 'her' project and an example of an undertaking begun and seen through. In her biography, Archie attributes her concern: It cannot be doubted that the ever present thought of her own children, whom she had lost, was an incentive to her care for these destitute little girls.<sup>471</sup>

The involvement of the Bishop, visiting as he did the hospital wards, during the time of the cholera epidemic, did not go unnoticed in the press as evidenced by the statement in

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<sup>469</sup> Catharine began to go to theology lectures at Queen's College but realised she could not keep up the attendance regularly so she gave it up. See Randall Davidson (1891) Life of ACTait p 450

<sup>470</sup> Edith Davidson and Mary Mills (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth p 12

<sup>471</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 73

The Daily Telegraph: 'He is the most Christian of our bishops',<sup>472</sup> or as was commented by a correspondent to The Church Times:

I could not but think what a difference there was between this priest of God and the one quoted in your paper of Sat. week who, with a bag of camphor about his neck, knelt down outside the door of one of the wards, read a collect and was out of the place again in five minutes. How many too of our bishops are there who would have done what the Bishop of London has done, and he too in a very imperfect state of health.<sup>473</sup>

This 'very imperfect state of health' was no exaggeration and the additional strain put upon him together with the impossibility of his being able to take a holiday, meant that, by the time he was able to leave London, he was again gravely ill and was unable to deliver his first 'charge' to the city of London. This was done for him in St Paul's Cathedral and its text was published, outlining his picture of the city as he found it and his plans for its future. But, in addressing the London clergy, he was seen now as one who had, with his wife and family, stood among them in their pain and hardship and for this had paid a heavy price.

I have considered, and been able to construct from their correspondence, a fairly clear picture of the courtship of Archie and Catharine but there is much less evidence on which to base pictures of some parts of their marriage. In an abbreviated version of the biography of Archie Tait it is stated that, following only two years of marriage 'there was some fear the marriage might be barren' - a conjecture strongly refuted by their production of nine children. Having a husband working at home did mean, in the early years, that although he worked hard, Catharine was sure always that her husband was close at hand as she embarked on all the challenges this new life brought her. Even at this stage it was a life in the public eye - the truly critical and all seeing eyes of adolescent boys, and yet they did try to legislate for time together and, in opening up their sitting room at certain times for the entertainment and hospitality of boys and masters, they were able to declare other times 'private'. The birth of Catty, their first daughter, brought with it the addition of nursery staff to the existing household. Thereafter, as their household grew, so did its support staff. Their houses were undoubtedly 'tied' and it was not until the time of the London Episcopate that they

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<sup>472</sup> Daily Telegraph 25.9.1867

purchased a house of their own at Broadstairs, in order to be able to escape more easily from the public eye. It is not possible to ignore how convenient this purchase became when eventually Archie was called to the Primacy and, therefore, became, at least part-time, a resident of Kent. It is also to be noted that it was on the land surrounding this property that Catharine's orphanage was built when it was removed to the fresh air of the Kentish coast from the unhealthy air of Fulham. The Taites did however, have an offer of removal from the strain and the unhealthy air of London when Archie was offered the Archbishopric of York. It was a very clear advancement and made to one who was not averse to climbing the ladder but, for whatever reasons<sup>474</sup>, he refused and so, ultimately the greater prize, the Primacy of all England, was his for the taking.

Having taken on already three elevated positions for which he had had little training and no experience, it should not have caused any great concern that the premier position in the Church of England should come his way. He was in fact, probably better prepared for this post than any of those he had previously undertaken. He was 57 and Catharine 49. Their 'second family' were growing up to be the support and the credit to their parents they had every reason to expect. Craufurd was at Oxford but the three daughters, Lucy, Edith and Agnes who had passed all their lives so far at Fulham, were not so enamoured of the prospect of moving to the gloomy palace on the other side of the Thames. It cannot be however, that their lives changed all that much. There were tutors and governesses, visitations from relatives, the inevitable visiting and being visited that had been so much a feature of their lives already. But this time the area of their father's concern was much wider. In exchange for the thousand London clergy and their wives and families and city parishes, there was the church worldwide, with all its bishops and legislation as well as the pastoral oversight of the enormous diocese of Canterbury. There was the Palace, but it rejoiced in an extensive park, which could and indeed was opened up for the use of all sorts and conditions of people, though this did not seem apparent to the leader writer in The Daily Chronicle who remarked on the:

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<sup>473</sup> The Church Times 25.8.1866

<sup>474</sup> It has been suggested that Catharine was instrumental in his refusal of this post. The reasoning would seem to be that there were many projects already begun which it would be unhelpful to relinquish at this point.

...magnificent park of 20 acres at Lambeth, to which the poor are not admitted because the Archbishop of Canterbury and his wife require it all for themselves.<sup>475</sup>

Such is the nature of public misunderstanding or misrepresentation, that it was necessary for Randall Davidson, the Archbishop's chaplain, to respond to the paper and remind its readers of the 28 cricket clubs, football teams, rifle clubs, school treats and open days for the sick and aged poor which occupied those same acres throughout the year. There were other residences, in Canterbury and at Addington, and these were able to provide some of the much needed retreat and privacy that their public life so often denied them. One of the handbooks for the clergy written while Archie was at Oxford comments that... 'Other professions are indeed professions, they are exercised but outwardly... But this indulgence ... is denied the clergyman.'<sup>476</sup>

Gradually, the girls learned to love all their homes, and Archie tried to maintain as much of a family presence as he could though, as Edith was to remark in her biography, referring back in her old age: 'all the Fulham time is full in my mind of Mother but there is not nearly so much of Father...'<sup>477</sup>, and once at Lambeth, it was even harder to maintain as much family contact as was desired. Fulham had been a happy home, following the sadness that had caused their being there and in his end of year journal entry Archie reflected on this:

I have seen the sun of 1868 go down over the Thames as I have watched the last sun of many years back...Year has succeeded year and healed our wounds and Craufurd has become a man, and Edith and Agnes have been added to our family and much happiness has by God's mercy been ours in this house.<sup>478</sup>

A month previously, he had noted in his journal his indebtedness to his wife in all he did. 'I thank thee O lord for the great help I have received from my dear wife. Spare her to me, I beseech thee.'<sup>479</sup> He had also remarked the month before, rejoicing in the possession of their own house at Broadstairs: 'The calm of this seaside retreat is very grateful. We are having a new honeymoon after 25 years of married life'<sup>480</sup> and,

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<sup>475</sup> Daily Chronicle 28.9.1878

<sup>476</sup> Robert Wilson Evans (1842) The Bishopric of Souls p 199

<sup>477</sup> Edith Davidson and Mary Mills (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth p 16

<sup>478</sup> Edith Davidson and Mary Mills (1938) Edith Davidson of Lambeth p 17

<sup>479</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 539

<sup>480</sup> ibid p 535

following convalescence there after another bout of illness, 'Now my beloved and I are enjoying the calmness of a Sunday evening together.'<sup>481</sup> These moments were precious to him, the calming and strengthening influence that throughout their life together Catharine had exerted over him. While she was 'spared to him' for ten more years, there was still one more tragedy yet to share.

A feature of the lives of most of the women examined in this thesis seems to be the place of holidays in the structure of the year. Inevitably, the Master's family would be expected to absent themselves for July and August in the way of most schoolteacher's families, visiting relatives and spending time away from the school in rented places at the sea or in the countryside with the children. Mindful of his new wife's limited travelling in her youth, Archie resolved to make amends for this with their first 'proper' holiday after their marriage. In the company of two of his brothers and a nephew they sailed to Calais and then took the 'post' across France to Italy, arriving in Genoa to take the boat to Naples and Sorrento, to see Vesuvius erupting, then back up to Perugia, Florence, Bologna and Milan. They returned to Calais via Switzerland, crossing mountain passes and always being criticised, at their posting stages, of trying to do it all 'too fast'. In Rome, Archie was recorded as commenting 'I cannot endure museums!'. It is hard to imagine that such a sentiment would have been shared by his wife. However rushed and ambitious this trip may have been, in his anxiety to share with Catharine all the wonders he had experienced in his own 'Grand Tours', he did concede in his diary that:

It is very well to pass few months abroad, but the hurry and want of peace make it by no means the best relaxation for a man who fears that during the rest of the year he has more work than is consistent with quiet thoughtfulness.<sup>482</sup>

His words were in some ways prophetic, for the following years with the birth of his first children and his own severe illness, reinforced the need for peace and relaxation but such a strenuous endeavour was not absent forever from the Tait itinerary. Meanwhile the holidays continued, often joining up with cousins or spending time *en famille*, enjoying all the traditional family pursuits, walking, reading and sight seeing. It was the opportunity to step down from the pedestal, to relax and to regenerate. As time passed, when the 'second family' grew up the holidays extended to further places and the Taits

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<sup>481</sup> William Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait p 102



became seasoned travellers. Whether at home, in Scotland or the Lakes, or at Addington, there were, in addition to the core family, the ever-present cousins from their two extended families: 'My wife cemented the different elements which composed this joint family.'<sup>483</sup> Indeed, in the Visitors' Book and the Guest Lists of both Fulham and Canterbury residences, the family names of Selfe, Wake, Tait, Campbell, Spooner, Fortescue and many others recur again and again

A printed leaflet exists in the papers from the celebrated travel agent Thomas Cook who, in 1870 accompanied the Taites (father, mother, Craufurd, Lucy, Edith and Agnes) plus Lady Wake and daughter and Max Spooner (a nephew and chaplain) together with assorted maids and valets, across Europe to Innsbruck via Ostend, Cologne and Heidelberg. The aim of the journey was to reach the salutary air of the mountains in order to aid the Archbishop's recovery from yet another bout of rheumatic fever and overwork. A doctor was included and this imposing party of 16 progressed across Europe by coach and would appear to have passed an enjoyable and extended stay once arrived. Nevertheless, it was not forgotten that this was principally a journey of convalescence and:

Catharine's great object was to keep her husband's mind as tranquil as possible, always reducing us to silence when sudden and animated discussion arose, as frequently was the case when the newspapers brought us news of one startling event after another.<sup>484</sup>

The reason for this anxiety and interest was the troubled state of neighbouring France in 1870, caught in the throes of the Commune. Not that Archie was unaware of the situation, and when, planning their return, Catharine decreed they should travel through France, was quick to remind her that there was every danger of his being captured and executed, should they attempt anything so foolish. Nor was the Archbishop able to be totally separated from the troubles at home. Lady Wake describes a drive in which Catharine took dictation from him concerning a case which had been sent for his revision. There was an understanding that a change of climate could greatly assist recovery and that, since journeys took time and caused much distress and discomfort for

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<sup>482</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1881) Life of A C Tait p 124

<sup>483</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1881) Life of A C Tait

<sup>484</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) (1909) Reminiscences of Lady Wake p 306

the patient, such stays abroad should be lengthy. Catharine 'managed' her husband's illnesses as she managed so many areas of their life together, with tact, strength and understanding, underpinned all the time by her confidence and faith - what her sister in law describes as 'the wonderful combination in Catharine's character of strong will with entire submission.'<sup>485</sup>

Throughout many of the crises and major events which determined the course of their life there are gendered differences to the way their lives were affected – she was the supportive woman in almost every circumstance, yet I do not believe that these influences were as clearly demarcated as one might suppose. While the death of the five daughters was a significant event in both their lives and coloured their attitudes and their relationship thereafter, nevertheless, it was Archie's career that changed as a result of it. Similarly, while he was a significant player in the response to the cholera epidemic of 1866, it was this event which gave her a way to mobilise help and engage in what some described as her lifetime's work. Archie's dependence on Catharine never ceased in her lifetime and beyond. Most onerous of all the burdens she was called upon to bear for him were the confidences of friends and doctors when their beloved son Craufurd, who had progressed from his father's chaplaincy to his own parish, was found to be terminally ill. It was felt she could bear the news better than the Archbishop and prepare him for it. They were wrong; nursing her son at 29, towards his death, brought her to the end of her resources and six months later 'all that could die of her was laid to rest'.

It had seemed that Catherine's great strength, not only spiritual but physical as well had not gone unnoticed by her husband who commented in her biography:

I suppose one secret of her being able to get through so much in the day was her extraordinary bodily strength, which was really greater than falls to the share of most women.<sup>486</sup>

And so it would seem strange that someone so apparently fit should be struck down and die at such a comparatively young age - 59 - from what appeared to be a sudden gastric complaint. It is the more remarkable when, only days before her death, she had, when travelling up to join her sister in law in Scotland, with one of her daughters, dismissed the coachman some miles from their destination and proceeded on foot (to the extent of

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<sup>485</sup> *ibid* p 307

getting lost and going even further afield due to reading while walking). Indeed, Lady Wake comments that during that holiday in Scotland her '...powers of walking and climbing were undiminished'. However, this apparent burst of physical strength does not accord so well with all the witness accounts of those who had been with her in the preceding weeks and months since the death of Craufurd. There seems much evidence there of a 'letting go' - not in the relinquishing of duty, this was never an option... '...for neither she nor the Archbishop would shrink from the work that had been so gladly undertaken when all was bright around them.'<sup>487</sup> but in the seeking of assistance from the 78 year old Lady Wake and other younger family members to share the hospitality of the numerous Episcopal dignitaries at the Lambeth Conference. There are recorded perceptions of many who saw her there, and at other functions. What they record comes not only in the other biographical material but in the remembrances contained within letters of condolence to the Archbishop, among them the Bishop of Madras: 'Last July Mrs Tait seemed like fruit ripe for the Heavenly Gardener to gather. She was so gentle, loving, devout'.<sup>488</sup> Lady Wake herself describes her sister in law: 'Beloved Catharine, her beautiful dark eyes were ever seeming to look beyond, and in the tones of her voice there was a soft echo of sorrow',<sup>489</sup> and her husband reflected that 'Many noted the heavenly expression of sadness mingled with joy in my dear wife's face.'<sup>490</sup> (see figure 6).

Theirs was not so much a life that was planned - their youthful visions as expressed in their correspondence during their engagement, did not seem to be ambitious and they were both ready to acknowledge that the path of their life was in God's hands. They had both been 'framed' within an acknowledged and established structure - the country parish or the Oxford college - but individually they had grown within and beyond these structures. Archie entering into the arena of academic and religious and political debate on the one hand, staking out a position that would inevitably alienate and offend as many as it would please and encourage, and Catharine, drawn away from a simple

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<sup>486</sup> William Benham (1879) *Catharine and Craufurd Tait* p 238

<sup>487</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) (1909) *Reminiscences of Lady Wake* p 309

<sup>488</sup> Tait papers letter from Bishop of Madras 15.2.1879 piece 99- 48

<sup>489</sup> Lucy Wake (ed) (1909) *Reminiscences of Lady Wake* p 309

<sup>490</sup> William Benham and Randall Davidson (1881) *Life of A C Tait*.

**Figure 6. Catharine Tait**

evangelical faith towards 'the type of religion of which Keble may be taken as one of the purest and best exponents', and a' love for the ceremonial of the English Church... in which her deep inward piety embodied itself<sup>491</sup>. As a husband and wife their views on

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<sup>491</sup> Review of Davidson and Benham (1879) Catharine and Craufurd Tait in The Times October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1879

matters of religious form and observance differed but what united them was far deeper and stronger than anything that separated them, such that Catharine remained:

united to him in the truest fellowship of the soul, while still tempering, by the associations of her early Oxford bias, whatever might otherwise have been harsh in his judgements of the good men from whom on principle he differed.<sup>492</sup>

Framed within such a loving marriage and fashioned by the sorrows, the challenges and delight in family and in duty, she shone throughout her life;

a life not less remarkable for its external brightness and prosperity than for the severe afflictions by which it was accompanied. It was a busy, hardworking life made so partly by necessary conditions but still more by her unwearied devotion to good works and to the duties connected with the varied positions which she successively occupied.<sup>493</sup>

However one views the concept of destiny, the rites of their passage were certainly determined by major events... the birth of the Oxford Movement, the sudden death of Arnold of Rugby, Archie Tait's illness, the scarlet fever epidemic in Carlisle, the crisis in the Church of England with the need for a steady hand to guide it, the cholera epidemic in London; conflict, death or disaster pointing up each time a new challenge. With the growing up of their second family, circumstances were different from those of their early marriage. Always it was necessary to be entertaining or be entertained. While this aspect of their life was something that developed in London and continued when Archie moved to Lambeth, there were other things that had to change and develop. He was, as Primate, at the beck and call of not only the Prime Minister, but also the Sovereign - being called in turn to Osborne and to Balmoral as well as Windsor. The burden was indeed heavy for there were weighty matters which had ultimately to be resolved through legislation after lengthy debate and much negotiation. It was essential sometimes to observe extreme discretion and at other times to take a firm and deliberate stand. The arena for all of this was the House of Lords but also the offices of the Prime Minister and the synods and conferences of the Church of England.

In all these arenas Catharine played her part, at his side at dinner parties, entertaining clergy and politicians, visiting, listening, being the sounding board and the intermediary

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<sup>492</sup> *ibid*

for matters that might trouble her husband and in which she might be able to share or mediate. Now was the flowering of all her upbringing, for her life was public and at its most exemplary. But if her years of reading and listening assisted her as she sat at table or walked the gardens with the great and the powerful, her years of care and compassion enabled her to continue to prepare her maids for confirmation, to include the girls of 'her' orphanage in all their family celebrations when in Kent and to continue to visit her old ladies in the workhouse at Lambeth.

In his address to his diocese on her death Archie concludes that

'my dear wife was my zealous helper and constantly encouraged me in every effort to do my duty amongst you. The daughter of a clergyman and born and brought up in a country parsonage, she knew well the trials and joys of your life. How I shall be able to fulfil my part amongst you hence forward God only knows'.<sup>494</sup>

In fact he did survive four more years although 'almost immediately (after Catharine's death) he became an old man'<sup>495</sup>. He was supported lovingly by his three daughters but also by his son-in-law Randall Davison who became his chaplain. The three girls served and developed in quite different ways. Although Lucy continued all her life her devotion to the orphanage and its demands, her life was centred around another clergy family, that of the next Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Benson. It was his wife, and eventually widow, Minnie, whose partner and support she became. Theirs was a quite different household, but once widowed, Minnie Benson suffered the difficulties of all such women in needing to vacate the 'tied accommodation' of the Primacy and to find a new direction for her life. Lucy, although deeply involved in this unconventional family and the painful and tortured lives of Minnie's children, did retain her own strong ties with her sisters and her nephew.

Edith, the middle daughter, was more like her mother in terms of charm and energetic devotion to duty. That she fell in love with her father's chaplain, Randall Davidson, brought with it both joy and sorrow. Their wedding preceded Catharine's death by two weeks, and so a decision to accept a parish in Kent or stay and support the bereft

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<sup>493</sup> Review of Davidson and Benham (1879) *Catharine and Craufurd Tait* in *The Times* October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1879

<sup>494</sup> Address to the clergy of the Archdiocese of Canterbury, December 1878

<sup>495</sup> P. T. Marsh (1969) *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England 1868-82* p x

Archbishop was a painful one to make, but duty prevailed and they remained with him at Lambeth for the rest of his life. (see figure 7).

**Figure 7. Archbishop Tait with his daughter Edith and son-in-law  
Randall Davidson after Catharine Tait's death**

On his death, however, they too were bound to move on and in their case upwards, for his preferment took him to Windsor as Dean, to Winchester as Bishop, and ultimately back to Lambeth as Archbishop. The youngest daughter Agnes remained the 'daughter at home' in her father's last years, reading to him and writing his journal but, on his death, and her sister and brother-in-law's removal, she found herself, loving, talented and energetic but nevertheless, a spinster without a home, glad of the hospitality of her relations, but without a niche to fill. The year after her father's death she did something unprecedented for women in her family, and enrolled at Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford. She only stayed one year, but it gave her an outlet for the inherited energy and even, for what her granddaughter describes as her passion for the stage and her desire to be an actress. With the flowing red-gold hair, the warm colouring and the ample proportions, she appears, in the Richmond portrait in the family's possession, with arms entwined around her sister Edith, the epitome of the 'liberated' pre-Raphaelite young women they could never be. Returning from university she slotted back into the life of the clergy family, marrying John Ellison, one of her father's chaplains. They had one son and then, six weeks after his birth, she died of a wrongly treated blood clot, at the age of twenty nine, leaving her baby to be brought up largely by his doting, practical, energetic and unstuffy aunts - the only Tait grandchild.

I think it would be inappropriate to conclude a chronicle of such a positive life on such a sad note. It is, however, important to observe that not all who benefit from such a godly nurturing do grow and flourish as did Catharine Tait. She was blessed, as her husband remarked, with amazingly good health and boundless energy. These are not qualities bestowed equally on the populace but merely elements of the circumstances which determine the direction of our lives, no matter what 'framing and fashioning' may have taken place. In considering what were the most significant elements in her character, I would want to isolate four features - that she was always seeking knowledge and personal growth, that she was joyfully bound by ties of love and duty which were to her a delight, that she enjoyed a truly loving marriage and family life and that, remembering the bonds that held her to past sorrow, she was always looking with absolute faith to the next world and to the joy of reunion. The memory of the five little girls and their grown up brother whose passing she had shared with her husband coloured all of their life together, uniting in a deep sorrow whose pain was tempered but never eradicated by the prospect of an ultimate reunion. It is not without significance that Archie chose Newman's



hymn 'Lead kindly light' for her funeral and it must have been immensely difficult, but hopefully reassuring, to sing the final verse:

So long Thy power hath blest me sure it still will lead me on  
O'er moor and fen o'er crag and torrent, till  
the night is gone  
And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> John Henry Newman Congregational Church Hymnal (1888) CUEW p 333

### 3. A companionate marriage: Henrietta Barnett (1851-1936)

Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity...<sup>497</sup>

When, in his last years, Samuel Barnett was made a Canon of Westminster and installed in a house in the Abbey Close, he insisted that the plate on the door of their new home should be replaced by one which bore the names of both himself and his wife. It would be hard to find such a marriage of equals, so balanced a partnership, so mutually supportive a relationship in any time or culture as the union of Henrietta Octavia Rowland and Samuel Augustus Barnett. Yet their coming together had hardly seemed to promise this. In 1873, Henrietta Rowland agreed to be engaged to the young clergyman she had met through a mutual friend, Octavia Hill, because she feared that if she refused him, one or other of them would have to give up the worthwhile and challenging work they had just begun to undertake. It was not an auspicious beginning for a marriage.

Within this chapter I hope to be able to show how a partnership between two people can develop, in spite of, as well as because of, their own individual abilities and temperaments. It is quite a different marriage from most others that I have studied, in that Henrietta does not fit into the perceived image of a supportive clergy wife. She might, on some occasions, be seen rather as a *supported* clergy wife. It would be reasonable to surmise that many of the things she did achieve in her long and eventful life, she might have achieved anyway, inside or outside a marriage. Indeed, her involvement in charity work and social reform had already begun before she met her husband and, as explained above, it was of sufficient importance to her that she was prepared to make the 'sacrifice' of agreeing to his proposal in order to be able to continue this work. But this is not the study of a social worker, it is the study of a marriage and I have selected this example because Henrietta brought with her to this relationship so many attributes that were able to flourish and develop within it.

A companionate marriage would suggest one based on mutual liking, shared interests, an agreed role definition, recognition of each other's strengths and weaknesses and concern for each other's well-being. But these are not things one knows or has much

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<sup>497</sup> The Book of Common Prayer (1870) Solemnization of Matrimony

experience of at the commencement of a relationship, Nor would one anticipate that companionship would be a predominant basis for a marriage between a couple aged 21 and 27. The plethora of advice literature that had poured out during the early and middle years of the century had much to say about a woman's role and expectations (see chapter 'Very Great Expectations'). The desirability of the married over the single state, the need to be supportive and subordinate, the necessity of acquiring domestic skills, the ability to entertain and to maintain a household and servants were all well described and advocated. In other literature the aspiration towards romantic love leading to marriage was promoted as the norm. Pragmatic reasons for marriage are not the stuff of the novel. What was missing from all of this was much help towards or even acknowledgement that a fulfilling and successful physical relationship might also be a major factor in companionship and that sexual compatibility might either complement or its absence severely diminish the happiness of a marriage.

Henrietta was pretty, rich, intelligent and lively. Her family seem to have had little influence on her choice of husband, she was, after all, no longer living at home. Samuel Barnett did not cut a dashing figure. She had met the young curate of St Mary's Bryanston Square at Octavia Hill's birthday party in December 1870. They had come to know her because of their own separate involvement in the Charity Organisation Society and efforts to improve the housing conditions in poor areas of London. Following this meeting Henrietta and Samuel had begun a correspondence. She was, however, quite amazed that one of his letters should turn out to be a proposal of marriage. '... I had accepted his interest as that of a kindly elderly gentleman ... far removed from a girlish ideas of a lover<sup>498</sup>.' Onlookers, such as Kate Potter, sister of Beatrice Webb, viewed him with similar disdain:

The young man - for he was young then, though he never looked it - struck me as plain and insignificant... In fact, what in my old hunting days I should have classed as a 'poor thing'.<sup>499</sup>

But fortunately Henrietta's perception of good was able to penetrate beyond appearances and, rather than refuse, she agreed to a period of absence at the end of which, after reflection, she might agree to an engagement. Her absence was curtailed

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<sup>498</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1918) Canon Barnett, His Life, Work and Friends p 37

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid*

by her sister's plan to get married sooner and on her return she and Samuel Barnett became engaged for, as she noted 'I had realised that the gift of his love was too holy to refuse.'<sup>500</sup> The couple spent a day on the river at Cookham before Samuel went off for a continental holiday with his brother 'because he had arranged to do so'. His new fiancée was not greatly impressed by this display of fraternal loyalty ...

Whether he was right or wrong I do not know, for during all our glad years together this reverence for punctuality was a frequent small trial to me, and the complete mastery of his thoughts a cause of envious bewilderment.<sup>501</sup>

They did marry, after much discussion about the form and location of their future home and parish. It was one of their most significant decisions. Neither Henrietta nor Samuel had grown up in a clerical family, so they had none of the mother/father's knee apprenticeship that aided so many of their colleagues. Samuel's father was a Bristol businessman who, with his wife, had indulged his sons, allowing them to opt not to go to school and to grow up on a diet more attractive to young boys than good for their health. Yet Samuel always had it in mind to take Holy Orders, and though, having had no education beyond tutors at home, he therefore, had to spend a traumatic and ill-remembered year at a 'crammer', he eventually passed such exams as were necessary for him to be entered into Wadham College, Oxford.

Henrietta's upbringing was similar in that it lacked intellectual stimulation for a very intelligent young woman or the kind of grounding in social concern and involvement that daughters of the vicarage might encounter and hold as a preparation for the role of clergy wife. In a note as a preface to her Presidential Address at a Conference at Toynbee Hall in 1929 she describes herself as

one of those unfortunate people who were never educated . My mother died at my birth, and the unmarried aunt who kept my father's house did not agree with girls being educated, and selected for my governesses excellent persons whom I despised. However, they taught me to read the Bible, and I taught them to ride; the gardeners...inspired me with a love of flowers, and my old nurse... taught me to sew, to speak the truth, to fear nothing except sin and snakes, and to consider the poor.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1918) Canon Barnett, His Life, Work and Friends p 53

<sup>501</sup> *ibid*

<sup>502</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1929) Matters that Matter p10

On reflection, it was not such a bad preparation for her future life. It was not until she was sixteen that she was allowed to go 'for three glorious terms' to a boarding school and there again she encountered influences which shaped her future; the dynamic Haddon sisters, James Hinton who was engaged to one of them, and a visit from a number of boys from the Dover Workhouse invited to tea to be entertained by the girls at the school. Sixty years later the image remained in her mind:

As I watched their low faces, their irresponsible ways, their sly unkindness to each other, their choice of brutal games, my girlish heart ached, and my ignorant mind revolted against the social injustices made evident by boys, odorous of institutionalism, dulled into inanity.<sup>503</sup>

Henrietta was as aware of her own fortunate circumstances, as she was conscious of the inadequacies of her education. Nowhere is she described as anything but a strong-minded woman, some were prepared to go further and accuse her of arrogance and obstinacy and yet, throughout her life, she was constantly sensitive to positive influences and to the situation of others. It was not long after this experience in her one year of formal schooling that Henrietta began to fight the social injustices of which she had become aware.

In London, Octavia Hill had begun a housing scheme, buying up slum properties and encouraging their tenants to improve their surroundings with her help and investment. The difference between Hill's methods and those of the number of charitably inclined middle and upper class women was that Hill did not believe in charity. Her philosophy was that it was demeaning to the poor to give them 'doles' which would only encourage them to seek more and more charitable support. Consequently, her giving was more a matter of investment, of encouragement to self-help and everything which tended towards a building up of self-respect and self-esteem. It was into one of these housing ventures that the young Henrietta Rowland was drawn with her 'high aspirations and child like reverence and energy.'<sup>504</sup> It was this philosophy that she adopted, and it was in carrying out this work that she came into contact with, and came to share the values of the man she was to marry. Samuel and Henrietta had it in mind to live and work in a

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<sup>503</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1929) Matters that Matter p 150

<sup>504</sup> Octavia Hill in Emily Southwood Maurice (ed) (1928) Octavia Hill, Early Ideals p 103-4 July 1869 quoted in Gillian Darley (1990) Octavia Hill, a Life p 113

parish in East London. This was where they saw the opportunity to build on the work they had already done with Octavia Hill, and to try and meet the kind of need that had become obvious to them, in the time they had worked with her. However, while searching for a suitable parish, an offer was made of one near Oxford and there was much family pressure for them to accept it, but they agreed it was not for them and their decision was roundly applauded by their mentor, Octavia Hill in a letter to Samuel on hearing the news:

I feel so proudly thankful of and for you both for your decision. It seems to me so wholly right...I am so very thankful you both stood firm. However, I knew it would be so with both of you; still it seems to have given your purpose such a ground- work to stand on. You have now done something more than picture it; you have paved the way on which you will tread<sup>505</sup>.

Octavia Hill did more than congratulate and encourage them, she actively set about approaching people of influence and when the living of St Jude's Whitechapel became vacant, in 1872, the Bishop of London offered it to Samuel Barnett, not that he felt he was offering anything of great worth:

Do not hurry in your decision ...it is the worst parish in my diocese inhabited mainly by a criminal population, and one which has, I fear, been much corrupted by doles<sup>506</sup>.

The Barnetts did what one might expect in response to this half-hearted gift. They explored and investigated. They consulted the 1871 census to gain a profile of the population and its density, and they visited the neighbourhood, not just the church buildings and the vicarage but the courts and alleys that surrounded them.<sup>507</sup> They sought the counsel of those close to them, among them Samuel's brother Frank, who was not positive, and who warned them, 'I am afraid you will miss your friends and there will be no neighbours to take their place.'<sup>508</sup> The existing parish organisation was examined, as were the accounts. There was little positive to be found in any avenue of their exploration. However, the decision was made, in circumstances which only Henrietta could describe so characteristically:

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<sup>505</sup> Henrietta Barnett Canon Barnett, his life, work and friends p 67

<sup>506</sup> ibid p 68 As a member of the Board of Guardians, Barnett was in favour of their decision not to give out-relief.

<sup>507</sup> The population of Whitechapel in 1871 was 6000. The housing was of the most dilapidated and unsanitary kind and none of the amenities which make life bearable was in evidence.

When Mr Barnett and I went to see our proposed home, it was one of those warm winter days when drizzle seems to magnify the noise and make sunshine a distant memory. It was market day, and the main street was filled with haycarts, entangled among which were droves of frightened cattle being driven to the slaughter-houses - then and now sights to shock the sensitive and encourage vegetarianism. The people were dirty and bedraggled, the children neglected, the streets littered and ill kept, the beer-shops full, the schools shut up. I can recall the realisation of the immensity of our task, the fear of failure to reach or help those crowds of people, with vice and woe and lawlessness written across their faces, and how, when we got outside the Vicarage and were alone in the street, standing opposite the church, came his touch on my hand and his question, 'Well, which way shall we decide?' adding his special pet name, and my reply, as I linked my arm into his, 'Let us try it; but we may fail.'<sup>509</sup>

Henrietta's account of this important occasion is found in her biography of her husband over thirty years after the event. Like many of her descriptions, she has therefore, the benefit of hindsight with which to colour her writing. Contemporary sources, however, were not greatly different in their descriptions. Whitechapel and the neighbouring areas were areas of great poverty, poor housing and overcrowding. 'The population of some six thousand persons, consisting largely of males,(who) were herded largely in crowded and unsanitary courts and alleys'<sup>510</sup> included a large percentage of immigrants and a fast-shifting movement of number of people with no stability or security. Pimlott goes on to record, 'we are told that while a few of the inhabitants worked as casual labourers, the majority stole or begged for their living.'

The choice then was made, not without opposition from some, but also with the approbation of others who were aware and understood what motivated them and Samuel and Henrietta. Thus, in 1873, they entered into their life's work as they were to enter their marriage, as equals - sharing love and real affection, mutual concern, realism and vision. All these would be needed in abundance for them to turn round the negative and unpromising features of the task before them.

Even after their marriage and their five week honeymoon, the Barnetts were not able to move into the Whitechapel Vicarage, for the previous incumbent was ill and still in

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<sup>508</sup> Henrietta Barnett Canon Barnett, his life, work and friends p 69

<sup>509</sup> Henrietta Barnett Canon Barnett, his life, work and friends p 69

residence. In the meantime, they took lodgings and traversed the narrow streets and grim courts of their parish daily to get to the church. Friends had no illusions about the difficulty of the work, some were dubious too about the usefulness of Henrietta's presence at all. Brooke Lambert, in a letter to Octavia Hill wrote: 'I am so sorry that Barnett means to marry before he goes to East London. The work is onerous and continuous and a wife can only be an encumbrance.'<sup>511</sup>

Samuel's mother too, although she had affection for her new daughter-in-law, had difficulty in understanding her desire to undertake the kind of social work she had in mind, and no sympathy at all with her wish to befriend the wicked. 'She was of the opinion that charitable assistance was for the respectable and the poverty of the poor arranged by the Almighty'<sup>512</sup>.

The work began from the most unpromising beginnings on which any advance would be progress. It was hard for the young and enthusiastic couple to cope with the slow pace of progress, and most difficult of all was the need to make clear to the congregation and the parishioners that 'doles' would not be available for the asking. They were great believers in using such of the system as was in existence in order that men and women might regain self-respect by realising that their improvement had been at least partly by their own efforts. This was not easy to convey, especially when it involved encouraging a man fallen upon hard times to go into the workhouse until he was able to straighten his circumstances and return to his family with his head held high ('out' relief was not available at the Whitechapel workhouse). Such was the fear of 'the House', and the expectation that a quick financial donation would solve the problem, that the Barnetts became at once very unpopular for their refusal to give more than sensible advice and contacts. Stones were thrown at the Vicarage windows and abuse at its inhabitants. The school buildings were unused and dilapidated, the church damp, cold and unlit.

Yet within a year the morning congregation had risen from six to thirty and the evening had doubled in size to a hundred. All manner of classes and groups had been established, as had parish visiting. From the Annual Report, it is possible to chart

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<sup>510</sup> J A R Pimlott (1935) *Toynbee Hall. Fifty Years of Social Progress*. p 15

<sup>511</sup> Gillian Darley (1990) *Octavia Hill, a Life* p 223

<sup>512</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) *Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends* p 146



progress, always couched in the humble words of the Vicar constantly referring to the inspiration behind all their works:

The end we have in view is that everyone may know God as a Father.. Every new scheme we propose, every plan we carry out, does its work if it throws one gleam of light on this truth<sup>513</sup>

To this end husband and wife were totally united; always it was their shared faith that underpinned their action. It seems for both of them to have been a faith grown into, and yet could never be described as blind or unquestioning, nor altogether conventional. Innovations like the holding of art exhibitions and classical concerts on Sundays and in the church took courage in their implementation. In the Vicarage discussion was always encouraged, particularly between the immense variety of people invited to supper in order that interesting people of all walks of life might meet and air ideas. These discussions were beneficial to the Barnetts, as much as their parishioners and friends, in the development of their philosophy. Their lives may have been many faceted but the thinking behind all their activities gradually formulated itself into a brand of Christian socialism on which they were able to expound and to publish books as well as being the ethos which brought about their great achievements and their place in history. It is clear from Barnett's own writing in his Reports of Parochial Work, that he was always torn by the two demands, of social, mental and cultural improvement on the one hand, and religious and spiritual advancement on the other. His wife, in her biography of him explains that, while in 'a parish where conditions are normal' he might have been able to teach religious truths, the condition of the people in Whitechapel was such that he felt it essential to improve their daily lives and aspirations first. 'The walls of degrading and crippling environment hid from many the light of truth'.<sup>514</sup>

Walter Crane, the artist, was a friend and designed a cover for the St Jude's parish magazine which illustrated much of their interpretation of the means to social justice, (see figure 8).

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<sup>513</sup> Henrietta Barnett Canon Barnett, his life, work and friends p 75

<sup>514</sup> Henrietta Barnett Canon Barnett, his life, work and friends p 76

**Figure 8. Cover for St Jude's, Whitechapel Parish magazine designed by Walter Crane**

When it first appeared it was Henrietta who accompanied it with an article <sup>515</sup> explaining to the readers the symbolism behind the different elements of the picture and the importance of such aims in the world in which they were living. The slogan 'One for all and all for one' shines from the lamp held high by an angel draped in banners proclaiming ; 'work for all', 'the new social order', art for all' and 'hope'. At the same time Samuel was declaiming that:

All these supplementary charities must vanish some day - medical/educational relief will have to be free. There is no law to discriminate desert, except the law which lets the weakest starve and that, another law, set in humanity contradicts<sup>516</sup>.

and : 'free schools, free doctors, free books and free church are planks in my platform.'<sup>517</sup>

Samuel Barnett's 'platform' exemplified his social as well as his religious philosophy. There was no question in his mind as to how things should be, the only question being how to bring such things about. For himself, he could be deeply involved in the running of the School Boards and local and national committees, he could preach and speak and write and talk to influential friends, but he was realist enough to know that he only had one man's strength and that not always very reliable in terms of health. What he needed to bring about his dream was youthful energy and the possibility of young men, fresh from university, coming to work in the poorest areas of London was going to be his means to achieving it. Thus he set about establishing a base for the university settlement movement and in 1883 Toynbee Hall was born. It had developed from ideas he had shared with like-minded colleagues, in the church, at Oxford, and in at the conversaciones in the Whitechapel vicarage. Samuel's role as a founder of the settlement movement and particularly his part in the establishment of Toynbee Hall may be seen as his most significant achievements... *Si monumentum requierat....* But although it is acknowledged as being his achievement, he, himself would have none of it... 'My wife and I had a great deal to do with starting Toynbee Hall, my wife quite as much as myself'<sup>518</sup>. (see figure 9).

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<sup>515</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1893) in St Jude's parish magazine Vol V no 4.

<sup>516</sup> Samuel Barnett in correspondence with his brother - Barnett collection GLRO F/BAR/98

<sup>517</sup> Ibid

<sup>518</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1930) Matters that Matter p 2

**Figure 9. Samuel and Henrietta Barnett (taken at the time when Toynbee Hall was founded)**

While they both spoke on all possible occasions, and to all the influential people they encountered in the process of establishing this venture, it was Samuel's particular responsibility and it was he who became its Warden, in addition to his tasks as Vicar of St Jude's. The two ran alongside, for it was through a number of the multifarious activities set up by the Barnetts and others at St Jude's that many of the young men found their first challenge and opening to help the poor of East London. But Barnett's description of the newly opened Hall in his Parochial Report is monumental in its underplaying of the significance of this movement and its effect on both the community and the men who became part of it and who took its inspiration back to their universities and on into their lives.

Twenty members of the University live their own life in the midst of the parish, they do their work and entertain their friends, they lend their rooms for classes, lectures and parties, they make friends with their neighbours and take their share in a citizen's duties.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Rev S A Barnett (1889) Sixteenth Pastoral Address p 13

Similarly, it was to the residents of the Hall that the parish workers could look for abundant manpower, energy and support. The first residents were carefully selected. There were fourteen initially but with many more coming as visitors. Of that first fourteen, five were or became clergy. Among the early cohorts were men of immense quality who, as a result of the Hall's influence, took their undoubted ability out, not into business but into social service and administration. The Warden's task was to be on hand to talk to and advise the residents, as well as to constantly keep the ethos of the Hall, its aspirations and the wider spread of the Settlement Movement, in the eye of the powerful and those with means, in order that this great venture might spread in influence and outreach. Henrietta saw her role in the establishment in rather more practical terms than her husband...

My position in the organisation was difficult to define. I did not mind housekeeping - indeed I liked doing it efficiently but my husband resented the assumption that to see to domestic comfort was my sole value.<sup>520</sup>

Not all of the residents appreciated her presence, some seeing a woman in a male preserve as an intrusion but others looked on more positively.

... Mrs Barnett did more than refine our male roughness, she gave Residents a new ideal of married life, that of the wife as an equal partner with the husband in work and thought. Together they did what neither could have done apart<sup>521</sup>.

It was, however, difficult sometimes to reconcile the demands of both Toynbee Hall and St Jude's, and these were not the only pressures, Samuel being involved, as he was in so many other schemes and committees, and Henrietta having her eye on matters further afield.

Like the young men of the Settlement, it was in the social work and concern for the poor in the parish of St Jude's, that she found causes enough to espouse and to fire with her amazing emotional and organisational strength. Henrietta was adept at identifying a need, seeking out its cause and developing a two-pronged attack in which she set up systems to practically resolve problems; societies for befriending young servants or pupil-teachers, for finding employment for girls, for 'rescuing' girls in moral danger and

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<sup>520</sup> *ibid* p 433

<sup>521</sup> Rev S A Barnett (1889) *Sixteenth Pastoral Address* p 434-5

for providing country holidays for city children or convalescent or tired workers or families. The other prong of her attack was to bring pressure to bear on the causes of illness, danger or distress by using her committees and her contacts to bring about better housing, greater social responsibility, improved employment protection and a bringing of people together to avoid the evils of a society divided between the poor and the rest.

It was quality of life for all that she sought, from the early days of her confrontation with the boys from the Dover Workhouse, through her journeys along the streets and alleys of Whitechapel, to her relationships with the 'submerged tenth' of the population. She deplored the chilling uniformity of the children she saw on her visits as Poor Law Guardian to the Workhouse where she witnessed the demeaning and debilitating effect of poverty and institutionalism. She had a vision of a common humanity...'We are just ordinary, everyday men and women. We all work, wash and garden,'<sup>522</sup> in which rights and privileges existed alongside duties and responsibilities for everyone. Thus she called for the opportunity to enjoy fresh air and countryside, to listen to good music or admire works of art as the right, not only of the wealthy, but of everyone. She had no problem with a tension between beauty and usefulness - hence the Walter Crane design for the cover of the St.Jude magazine, the use of the church for classical concerts, the introduction of 'great minds' to local people in the many gatherings and parties at the Vicarage and Toynbee Hall and the introduction of art exhibitions, growing eventually into the establishment of the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

Neither did Henrietta have any double standard for the sharing out of non-financial riches. She was aware that she and her husband needed encouragement and refreshment but that so did those among whom they worked. In a letter to a fellow worker she says 'I wish I could share my thirty five gifts of gorgeous flowers with East London'<sup>523</sup> and always it was their own houses, in Whitechapel, in Hampstead and even their holiday homes, that they were willing to share, if the need arose. It was eventually this quest for quality surroundings that led to Henrietta's greatest venture. In 1897 she went to Bournville to lecture and was much impressed by her visit to the model village and factory site. Here was a provision of housing and workplace designed and planned for the benefit and for the pleasure and delight of the people most concerned - those

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<sup>522</sup> Kathleen M Slack Henrietta's Dream (1982) p 8

who lived and worked there. At the same time she was on a committee concerned with the preservation of London's open spaces, notably Hampstead Heath. What if land were purchased and a community set up outside London, therefore, with all the benefit of the countryside, but near enough for its inhabitants to work in London - able at the end of the working day to have 'a refreshing glimpse of the cool green hillside?'<sup>524</sup> She set about the task of purchasing the land, owned by the Trustees of Eton College but was advised by a friend

You are only a woman, Mrs Barnett, and I doubt if the Eton Trustees would grant the option of so large and valuable an estate to a woman. Now if you could get a few men behind you, it would be alright.<sup>525</sup>

Galling though this comment must have been to a woman whose only difficulty with equality of the sexes was whether men were really women's equal at all, she took note of the advice (the end justifying the means) and gathered to her... 'a veritable shewman's happy family, two Earls, two lawyers, two Churchmen, a Bishop and a woman'<sup>526</sup> to bring the project to fruition.

Samuel always appeared to take immense pride and interest in his wife's achievements and supported her loyally through all the difficulties and frustrations that arose in this massive project. This support may have cost him dear, for it often deprived him of his wife, but nowhere does he complain, simply concerning himself with her state of health. Even when the Garden Suburb was open, it was not the end, for it was a living and growing entity. Central to it were the churches, and in 1913 the parish church of St Jude-on-the-Hill was topped with its tower and spire, given to Henrietta in recognition of her sixtieth birthday. Samuel, in his 'Message to the Future' written to be encased in the pommel of the spire at the request of Sir Edwyn Lutyens, the architect, attributed this gift to his wife: '...by many friends, in recognition of her unfailing interest in healthy, happy homes, in beauty, and in goodness and of her unconquerable hope.'<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Henrietta Barnett in a letter of Mr Catchpole, Toynbee House Papers (1928) A/TOY/7/15

<sup>524</sup> Mervyn Miller (1995) Henrietta Barnett's Suburb Salubrious p10

<sup>525</sup> Mr Sandy, quoted in Kathleen M Slack Henrietta's Dream (1982) p 10

<sup>526</sup> Mervyn Miller (1995) Henrietta Barnett's Suburb Salubrious p 9

<sup>527</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 768

All the concern expressed in the past about a wife being an encumbrance in a tough East London parish would surely not have been found to be so in the case of the Barnetts. Henrietta took on the role of clergy wife as she took on everything in her life - with total commitment and enormous energy. There was an understanding between them that their role in the parish was to concern themselves with all of their parishioners and their lives within the community. This involved the provision of clubs, classes and activities within the church and on its premises and work in the community in matters such as rent collection and the management and improvement of houses and public amenities. For this additional people were required and such people presented themselves, often as a result of inspirational speeches made by Samuel to organisations and groups of people not resident in Whitechapel. This sort of recruitment was vital, providing as it did people with great dedication to the folk amongst whom they worked as well as friends and co-workers for the Barnetts and their ever-growing church organisation. Henrietta did not always receive these newcomers with high expectations...

It was after the evening service, when one was longing for supper and peace, that I got a message to say a new worker, Miss Paterson, was in the vestry with my husband, who wanted me to see her. 'Oh bother !' was, I fear, my thought ...<sup>528</sup>

Nor was her mind changed when introduced to this young woman for whom she thought keeping the clothes-cupboard tidy might be a suitable task. Yet she became a life-long friend, associate and inspiration to them both as well as the poor and the suffering with whom she worked. Part of the richness of the Barnett ministry in Whitechapel was the number of gifted and imaginative people they managed to attract and whose contribution extended beyond the mere carrying out of tasks to contributions to the overall thinking and development of the projects. The Barnetts not only had each other for support, but inspired and encouraged a wide network of support and involvement. The Report of Parish Work for 1891-92 speaks of a staff of a vicar and three other clergy, two mission women, fifteen Sunday School teachers and two superintendents. Mrs Barnett is noted as being president of a number of organisations and a Sunday School teacher. Yet there are in the text of the report comments which suggest that sometimes Henrietta at least might be overstretched:



Mrs Barnett is still Honorary Secretary of the Whitechapel branch (of the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants) but on her co- Hon.Sec. has fallen the burden of the work.

In the sermon at her funeral, the Archbishop of Canterbury mused on the question of time:

How she managed to find time for all her manifold social service activities especially during the twenty-two years she and her husband were in Whitechapel, must always remain something of a mystery.<sup>529</sup>

Samuel himself, in his Seventeenth Pastoral Address for the year 1889- 90, comments that 'Mrs Barnett and I keep up our Poor Law work, though not as closely as we would wish<sup>530</sup>.' Undoubtedly they must have managed their time well to achieve all they did, but Samuel's clerical duties would have been fairly clearly defined and his additional activities either a complement to or an extension of these.

Not everyone appreciated his efforts, and he often received anonymous letters which hurt him deeply but from which he would try to draw lessons that would improve his own performance. His wife had little patience with his humility - it was something she marvelled at but did not suffer from personally. Her concern was for his well-being and for their survival in the uncongenial air of their chosen parish. It was with this in mind, that they sought a refuge outside of London on the high land at Hampstead, and purchased a cottage to which they could repair at weekends and for the purposes of convalescence. Both Samuel and Henrietta endured periods of ill-health when one or other of them would be banished to the cottage, or together they would seek the sun or the fresh air of foreign places. They were aware that they lived in an unsanitary and unhealthy environment and campaigned fiercely for the closure of city slaughterhouses and for improvements in water supply and drainage. They sought to demolish the worst courts and slums and to encourage the building of better houses and introduced flower and produce shows to give incentive to the use of allotments. All the time they were aware that they could always escape and refresh themselves, but were realistic enough to acknowledge that, if they did not, then they would be unable to carry on the work.

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<sup>528</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 104

<sup>529</sup> Archbishop Cosmo Lang quoted in The Church of England Newspaper 19.6.1936 p 2

However, the cottage, and later other buildings in Hampstead, were not for their exclusive use - they invited, constantly, their fellow workers and those whom they felt needed some peace and beauty in their surroundings, as witness this correspondence with a friend whose wife had just died :

*My dear friend,*

*I came from the Abbey, where I had been thinking of her sharing the Lord's suffering to find your telegram telling us she is sharing His peace. Thank God...Shall I come on Wednesday? Mrs Barnett puts in 'Let him come to us' Will you? We shall be at the Cottage and you can be very quiet among the trees and before the far view.*

*With our love, ever yours, Saml. A. Barnett*

*P.S. Yes, please come to us at the Cottage. We understand and have been through it all.....your fond friend H.O.Barnett* <sup>531</sup>

Throughout their illnesses, they protected each other while the fit one continued to carry on the work, and set such restrictions on the other as would prevent their returning too soon to the tasks in hand. Their doctors became dear friends, not bound by any requirement of a bedside manner... ' Dr McKenzie gave her a good overhauling to see if she may bicycle. He found her heart full sound but warned her against getting fat. He urged her that exercise and fat could not go together<sup>532</sup>.' Henrietta, in turn, nursed her own childhood nurse, who had stayed with her throughout her life. Henrietta's propensity for loving and caring was roundly acknowledged by others who often referred to her motherly nature : 'If Canon Barnett was called to the ministry,' Mrs Barnett was called just as certainly, and called also for the ministry of 'mothering'<sup>533</sup>. In a local parish magazine, an article on 'Notable Churchwomen' states, 'Her motherly heart yearned over the poor children.'<sup>534</sup> Indeed, all her most ardent striving and greatest battles were on behalf of children; battles for better education, for better quality of life for children in institutions, for country holidays and toys and good childcare.

All this, from a woman who had no children of her own. Her closest approach to motherhood was in the care of her ward Dorothy Noel Woods, daughter of her niece

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<sup>530</sup> St Jude's Whitechapel 17th Pastoral Address 1889-90 p 12

<sup>531</sup> Henrietta Barnett(1921) Samuel Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 261

<sup>532</sup> Samuel Barnett in a letter to Frank Barnett 28.11.1896 F/BAR 155

<sup>533</sup> John Northcote in the introduction to Matters that Matter 1930 p 1

<sup>534</sup> Mrs Tooley in Christ Church, Gypsy Hill Parish Magazine September 1911 p 211

Catherine, who came to live with them as an orphan from 1893 until her premature death in 1901 and who was 'to us both ... uninterrupted joy and.... took a place in our lives that nothing else did before or since.'<sup>535</sup> Although the Barnetts had no children, Samuel's brother had four and they remained close, Samuel continuing to write to them when his thirty-year long weekly correspondence with his brother ended at his brother's death. In all senses, though they were childless, they were never without family for all around them they felt the warmth and love of the Whitechapel community to which they belonged. It was this overwhelming love and affection from such a range of people within the parish, that caused Samuel to wonder whether such a blessing was in fact keeping him from truly fulfilling his vocation, and inhibiting him from carrying out his spiritual ministry. On a holiday in Japan, he and Henrietta debated this and arrived at the conclusion that on their return they would see the Bishop of London...

determined to turn our backs on beloved St Jude's and on Toynbee with its brilliant society glad eager life, influential following, and troops of devoted friends, and go, just he and I alone, further east and there, stript of the paraphernalia of a successful organisation, live side by side with the poor and the sad, and reach after their souls.<sup>536</sup>

What ensued was an abortive interview, during which the Bishop got on with his correspondence and hardly afforded Samuel an answer at all. 'They will follow you and Mrs Barnett wherever you go', being his only response, plus an unfulfilled promise to write. Henrietta records that they rarely spoke of this, because of the great pain it gave Samuel, and the immense indignation it aroused in her. She was never ambitious for him in any pursuit of advancement, but fiercely defensive of him, and his vulnerability, when his totally selfless motives were so ignorantly misunderstood. Early in their marriage she had seen a role for herself in marrying Samuel's lack of self-esteem with his immense ability:

With the motherliness of a young wife, I decided that would be good for him to have his ambitions fired, not with ecclesiastical ambition - thank God, we neither of us descended to that - but with a desire for the power which following recognition, would give further opportunities for service and influence<sup>537</sup>.

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<sup>535</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Samuel Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 353

<sup>536</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 526

<sup>537</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 145

Henrietta seems to have had no difficulties with her husband's philosophy - they came together committed to a shared desire for social justice which they developed throughout their lives together. Their faith and their commitment to the work of the Church of England endured in the face of many set-backs. Seth Koven, in his study of the Settlement Movement concludes that 'Barnett's loyalty to the Church of England never wavered,'<sup>538</sup> and Samuel took immense pleasure from his wife's presence alongside him at worship and at communion. It was not that they agreed on all matters, and Henrietta who could be forceful and critical is actually quoted as saying, when setting out her rationale for writing Samuel's biography :

I hope I have depicted him truthfully and not made him appear too good. Sometimes when I read biographies I put them down at the end, grateful that I have not known anyone quite so exemplary.<sup>539</sup>

I believe that in this faithful representation, she would have revealed major differences had they occurred between them, given that she was quite able to disclose smaller irritations. One of her principal difficulties was with his humility, which often cost her dear in self-restraint. After the humiliation of the Bishop of London's rejection of their offer to take another East London parish she records that;

...it added to his humility that his Bishop had not thought his offer worthy of consideration, and my husband's humility was a flower that became unhealthy if too much watered<sup>540</sup>.

She also records many paradoxes in his ways, including his humility: '(which) was one of the centres of his nature, and yet he assumed responsibilities and accepted positions which were hardly compatible with self-depreciation.'(sic)<sup>541</sup>

It was her ardent belief in him that enabled him not to shrink totally into obscurity. Beatrice Webb was of the opinion that she would be objectionably conceited if it were not for her genuine belief in her husband's superiority<sup>542</sup>. The area where she did see him fail, and did not confront him in a concern not to hurt him further, was in what seemed to be his failure as a preacher. He was well aware that he did not have the gift

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<sup>538</sup> Seth Koven (1987) Culture and Poverty The London Settlement House Movement 1870-1914 Harvard University PhD

<sup>539</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p xiii

<sup>540</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 527

<sup>541</sup> *ibid* p ix

<sup>542</sup> Beatrice Webb quoted in Kathleen M Slack (1982) Henrietta's Dream p 7-8

of oratory in the pulpit. Strangely, his speaking in other venues, when recruiting parish workers or raising funds and awareness from, and among, the wealthy and powerful, produced magnificent results but in St Jude's he was faced with empty pews. Henrietta was sure the fault was in his sermons being too inaccessible to the kind of congregation available to them in Whitechapel. She would be his sounding board from Monday, when he first settled on a subject, and throughout the week, but sermons did not necessarily improve in the keeping: 'On Mondays' I used to say, 'it is simple, fit for a coster; on Saturdays only a philosopher could understand it'<sup>543</sup>.

Henrietta comments also on his daily prayer sessions at Toynbee Hall as being 'not always helpful'<sup>544</sup> and, when listening to a good speech by a friend at a dinner commented 'If only you could speak like that...'<sup>545</sup> Yet he turned to her in the face of all reverses :

If I were not so cross and conceited I should be able to reach men's souls and find out their needs. I have done all you said.... What else do I ever do but what you say? Whenever you don't say then I am rudderless. Oh, I shall be glad when you are back at the helm again, and together we can pick up the wrecks of my broken work'<sup>546</sup>.

It would be easy to suppose, from all this, that he was the weaker vessel and that all strength came from her. Strength, as in dogged determination, unflinching and unremitting effort yes, but the moral strength, the spiritual power behind their relationship was his. And while Henrietta had no difficulty in expressing her irritation at or incomprehension of some of his ways, this was only in small things, for in life writ large it was with love and respect that she held him.

The anomaly, in a relationship which was undoubtedly a loving one, between a couple marrying young and loving children, was their failure to have any of their own. Frank though the biography is in its descriptions of so many aspects of their life, it was not produced at a period when physical or intimate details of a relationship would have been an acceptable common currency. Henrietta is fairly frank about sex, devoting a lot of her

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<sup>543</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends

<sup>544</sup> *ibid* p 490

<sup>545</sup> *ibid* p 723

<sup>546</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 145

time to working with young prostitutes and advising young mothers. She even advocated to one woman, the restriction of 'marital rights' in order to persuade a husband to a point of view, but she has nothing to say of this aspect of her own life. It is tempting to read between the lines, but there are precious few lines on this subject. One telling comment occurs, at the beginning of the biography, when Henrietta is describing her husband's brief period in a 'crammer' at the age of seventeen prior to his going up to Oxford. Here the sheltered young man 'learned of evil from which he had hitherto been protected... it was this experience.... which may have caused his shrinking from any talk, however, pure or necessary, on sex questions<sup>547</sup>.' This is very slim evidence on which to base an answer to what must inevitably be a question about their childless state. But I believe it is worth at least some consideration for they unquestionably liked children, not just in a reformist and philanthropic way, but enjoying their company on holidays and at The Cottage. Had they made a conscious decision not to have children, because of the limitation it might have caused to their, (or rather Henrietta's), public work then they would not have taken on Dorothy Wood and brought her up as a daughter. Inability to conceive because of any physical deficiency in either of them would surely have caused some mention of regret, (without naming a cause obviously), in Henrietta's thorough chronicling of their life together, or references to greater amounts of illness if she had constantly miscarried. All these lead one to a conclusion of a marriage not consummated, with that one line in the 'Life' the key to it from Samuel (and inevitably) Henrietta's point of view. However, one has no image of a bitter woman, as is evidenced by a remark in a letter to a friend on news of a forthcoming baby, (a year before Henrietta died): 'I do believe in 'conceived by the Holy Ghost' and Whitechapel must be almost as good as a manger.'<sup>548</sup>

It appears from almost all their writing, joint books, shared projects or support for individual ventures, that in matters of philosophy and ideals the Barnetts were as one. They even speak of developing their ideas together and one could speak for the other in matters of social policy, the Settlement Movement, religion, politics and the welfare of children and young people. The list of papers, articles and books they published is impressive. Some of their views were contentious but they were well able to argue their

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<sup>547</sup> ibid p 8

<sup>548</sup> Henrietta Barnett in correspondence at the GLRO A/TOY/7/34

corner. Nor were their views merely pious or radical mouthings, for in terms of such matters as housing and personal wealth, they demonstrated their conviction through action. Their public acclaim meant they were invited to grand establishments as witness their visit to the home of the Rothschilds at Aston Clinton in 1890 :

Here we are in the world of the Rothschilds - how different it all is, on the outside is their niceness, their interest, their culture, on the other side is the oppression, the servants, the luxury of food and furniture. I am sure that a soul could hardly live under this wealth<sup>549</sup>.

But if 'the eye of the needle' might be a problem for the Jewish Rothschilds, the Barnetts were more troubled by something a little nearer home :

... after a reception at Lambeth where we admired his magnificent house and rather wondered what Christ would have said about his Bishop and clergy - what a puzzle it all is- dockers on strike - East London breathing fire and his clergy gloriously housed and served. This is a key to it but I can hardly blame those who decry it and say break it up<sup>550</sup>,

They were entitled to make such comments, given that they had not only chosen to go to the poorest of parishes in the first place, but, while their Vicarage remained occupied, had taken lodgings in an equally insalubrious area. Together they made a decision not to accept the salary for the Warden of Toynbee Hall, and when later on they made, in vain, their offer to move to another parish, it was on the understanding that it would cost the Church nothing. Furthermore, their homes and holiday residences were always open to others. This philosophy of sharing God's gifts and man's riches sits well alongside another strongly held (and shared) belief in equality of opportunity as in the programme of the Education Reform League set up by Samuel in 1884 and some of whose objects were:

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<sup>549</sup> Henrietta Barnett in correspondence at the GLRO F/BAR/102 15.3.1990

<sup>550</sup> Samuel Barnett in a letter to Frank Barnett F/BAR/120 6.5.93

1. University education for teachers in primary schools
2. Equal opportunities for all children to attain their highest capability by continuity of training - technical, physical and intellectual
3. Improvements in the system of inspection
4. The more general employment of school buildings and play-grounds for people's benefit<sup>551</sup>.

In all areas they sought rights and responsibility; in their support of the Suffrage movement and in their exhortations, even in their parish magazine, to the dockers and others in their parish to use their vote. They battled for equality of status for men and women, and recognition of different strengths and gifts.

In 1888, Samuel accepted the post of Canon at Bristol Cathedral. Then, in his last years, he returned to London to become a Canon at Westminster Abbey. By the time they reached Westminster, the Barnetts were well-known people and Samuel was rejoicing in an opportunity to adopt a more contemplative life and to dwell, (as well as speak and write) on the spiritual matters which were the core of his life and ministry. He found the Abbey precinct life very different from Bristol and Whitechapel. Here, his preaching seems to have been well received, and even though he 'was never an orator in the ordinary sense of the word'<sup>552</sup>, there are positive comments recorded by those who heard him even if Henrietta did later comment that :

...the beauty of the Abbey, the immense congregations, and the contrast between the sounds of the gorgeous music and the one small voice, fanned my husband's ever-active flames of humility until the task seemed to be too great for him<sup>553</sup>.

There is plenty of material available to indicate Henrietta Barnett's view of herself, in her correspondence and the forewords and prefaces to many of her books. The very nature of her biography of her husband makes it as much a vehicle for her own opinions. She castigates herself very little - not suffering the burden of humility and self-doubt carried by her husband. She did not waste time on regrets and conjecture. She was also quite capable of acknowledging her own abilities. Comments gathered in Kathleen Slack's chronicle of the building of Hampstead Garden Suburb present a daunting picture:

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<sup>551</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, work and Friends p 293-4

<sup>552</sup> G.H.Å. quoted in Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 740

<sup>553</sup> Henrietta Barnett Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 738



A commanding presence, a benevolent tyrant, a domineering woman.  
The equal of Queen Mary.  
One who always believed she was right.  
A woman who would have her own way.  
A fascinating person because she was so outrageous.  
She did not care what she said, where she was or who was present<sup>554</sup>.

These comments do not present a very comfortable image and they certainly form no part of any conventional blue-print for an effective clergy wife. Yet she was a very effective clergy wife, but in a manner that owes much to her husband's image and perception of her and the value he set on her personality, abilities and loyalty. This view seems to have been the perception of her biographer within the Dictionary of National Biography who wrote, in the 1931-40 edition: 'It is impossible to measure what she owed to her husband's influence, and the story of their work together is best sought in the account of his life'<sup>555</sup>.

It was not that she was always bristling with energy and success, as so many biographical notes and tributes would have us believe - she had very low times too when it was his support that kept her from despair. As a Poor Law Guardian she not only fulfilled the role at Forest Gate, but campaigned furiously for the general improvement of the Poor Law Schools. This was an uphill struggle involving enormous amounts of lobbying and constant setbacks, such that, in January 1896, when she was battling for signatures for her report on the school service, she records: 'I feel very sick and inclined to vow never to do public work again. Samuel was over-tired yesterday but is much better. He is very good to me through it all'<sup>556</sup>.

Needless to say, she did not give up her public work, and a few months later, after she had attended a suffrage meeting, Samuel wrote in a letter to his brother :

Jetta came home last night in high spirits. She had made four speeches and had felt all the joy of power. It seems that 1200 women were present among whom were most of the leaders.  
....Jetta spoke also - I was glad to see her and glad to find how

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<sup>554</sup> Kathleen M Slack (1982) Henrietta's Dream p 8

<sup>555</sup> Dictionary of National Biography 1931-40 p 44

<sup>556</sup> Henrietta Barnett in correspondence concerning the Poor Law Schools Report 25.1.1896 F/BAR/134 GLRO

the experience had helped her to take a more level view of herself<sup>557</sup>.

Not that she always achieved all she set out to, as her obituary in the East London Observer of June 1936 remarks: 'Failure with Henrietta Barnett was only a relative term; that is to say she never quite did all she intended or wanted to,'<sup>558</sup>. This may be true, but I suspect most people would have felt they had done a lifetime's worth of good work in achieving a fraction of Henrietta's life's work. This particular reporter had evidently much with which he meant to qualify his praise, for he concludes: 'it is a hard saying, too hard, that her great book 'The Life of Canon Barnett' was mis-titled, and should have read 'The Wife of Canon Barnett'<sup>559</sup>,

Sixty years later, Seth Koven in his study of the Settlement Movement, noted also that she was not a woman for all tastes and that, in achieving what she did, there would have been some who would have found her difficult. The total picture must, however, remain positive :

Henrietta Barnett was no mere ornament to adorn a vicar's drawing room. She was a formidable woman, her husband's equal and partner in all that they did. Relentless in her logic as well as her opinions, she was a woman people liked to agree with, and feared to cross. *Essentially intolerant and undemocratic by nature, ... (she) was easier to admire than to love*<sup>560</sup>.

Whatever some commentators have said, contemporary or with the benefit of hindsight, it is true that she was loved as well as admired. She knew a great many people but she had a circle of friends and family with whom she remained close. Her friends grew out of her co-workers, united as they were in their ideals and shared vision. She inspired great loyalty from servants and parishioners whom she had known in her early days in Whitechapel. She was proud of the social mixing they were able to affect in their Vicarage drawing room;

*It was great fun 'hosting' so various an assortment of friends and my husband and I did it well., drawing out the characteristics of individuals to produce either sympathy or argument. We dared*

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<sup>557</sup> Samuel Barnett in correspondence with Frank Barnett 3.10.1896 F/BAR/153 GLRO

<sup>558</sup> East London Observer 13.6.1936

<sup>559</sup> *ibid*

<sup>560</sup> Seth Koven (1987) Culture and Poverty. The London Settlement House Movement 1870-1914 Harvard PhD

to give only simple, not to say frugal fare, so that none should be embarrassed<sup>561</sup>.

It was Samuel Barnett's wish that his funeral service should be held back among 'his' people at St Jude's in Whitechapel although by the time of his death he was a canon of Westminster Abbey. His wife's funeral twenty-three years later, was at St Jude's-on-the-Hill in Hampstead Garden Suburb, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, but it was, nevertheless, attended and reported on by many from Whitechapel. The dedicating of the church at the pinnacle of Hampstead Garden Suburb to St Jude was an enduring reminder of where their hearts were. It is in the realm of matters of the heart that we really find Henrietta and Samuel Barnett. However inauspicious may have been their courtship, however ready one might be to see limitations in the concept of a companionate marriage and whatever their lack of children might suggest about their physical relationship, theirs was a marriage of very great love and passion.

Henrietta agreed to the publishing of all of Samuel's letters to her, even though she was tempted to keep some of her 'gems' to herself because: 'It is not what a man does so much as what he is that helps forward striving souls, and my husband's tenderest depths could only be known to his wife<sup>562</sup>. And yet in a letter in 1911 concerning a request for reminiscences, following the establishment of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, she is also quite ready to draw a definite line for the benefit of publication: 'I think such experiences as you ask for are too sacred to make copy of. Is there not such a sin as immodesty of soul?'<sup>563</sup>

Indeed, she had little patience with the notion of gathering together her own writings. She had published widely on her own and with her husband but, when Mrs Lang, wife of the Archbishop, collected together a variety of her writings and speeches which came together under the heading 'Matters that Matter', she declared herself bored and critical of her past utterances and wished 'that more jokes could have been included...and that is not possible in a book.' And it is true that while the Barnetts both reveal themselves, their weaknesses and their imperfections, as well as their successes and their unfulfilled

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<sup>561</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) *Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends* p 223

<sup>562</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1921) *Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends* p vii

<sup>563</sup> Henrietta Barnett in correspondence with the Hampstead Garden Suburb Ltd 29.5.1911 at the Tower Hamlets Library

dreams in their correspondence and their writing, and while modesty is not a virtue one might readily attribute to Henrietta, Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of York, writing in his preface to her 'Life' speaks of the writing of the biography imposing on her 'a task of very exceptional delicacy and difficulty'<sup>564</sup>. This she acknowledges in her plan for the book :

It is very difficult to write a biography, and especially if the writer loves the character that is to be shown to the world...when the life and the love are so closely bound up with oneself.<sup>565</sup>

One must allow distance to be able to appreciate the full picture of this marriage. In his Introductory to Matters that Matter John Northcote declares:

The married life of Canon and Mrs Barnett was a veritable idyll. It was not simply that they worked shoulder to shoulder but from first to last, there was perfect understanding and complete equality. Before she was left alone, husband and wife were inseparable in the minds of their friends; it was hardly possible to think of the one without the other.<sup>566</sup>

The wide range of tributes and obituaries say very much the same. They had reached a point, following on from the opening of Hampstead Garden suburb, when they were constantly being made aware of the more concrete evidences of their labours, in addition to the myriad testimonies to their work and effort for the poor. A portrait of them both by Herkoner was presented to them by Prime Minister Asquith in 1896, and shows Samuel gazing pensively while Henrietta holds on her lap the plans of the yet to be built Hampstead utopia. In his speech Asquith comments on this dual portrait :

United they have always been in their ideals, in their work for this parish, for London and for England, happily united in the love of, and confidence in, one another, and united, as you and I may see today, in the affection and devotion of their friends.<sup>567</sup>

This was a public pronouncement on a public occasion. The Morning Post of November 1908, comments that for all his work for the poor. '...she has been his inspiration and his partner.'<sup>568</sup> He, in turn a year later is described as being '...very proud when he thought it (the building of Hampstead Garden Suburb) was the work of a woman, and

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<sup>564</sup> Cosmo Lang in his Preface to Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p vi

<sup>565</sup> Henrietta Barnett pvii

<sup>566</sup> John Northcote (1930) in Matters that Matter p 1

<sup>567</sup> Henrietta Barnett 1921) Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 757

that woman was his wife<sup>569</sup>, just as he attributed much of his great work (the founding of Toynbee Hall) to her. John Northcote comments that he never overlooked nor forgot 'the woman element,' and 'the woman element' to him always manifested itself in his wife<sup>570</sup>. It might seem that the declarations of devotion were principally his, but I cannot conclude this view of the life and marriage of these two remarkable people, without quoting at some length an anecdote of Henrietta's, included in her book, which describes an event a few days before Samuel's death when they were renting a house at Hove. It seems such an appropriate passage to draw to a close a description of such a rich and loving partnership.

I was standing by the garden gate waiting for the friendly fish-hawker who brought daily the best fish for the invalid, when a woman's voice said:

'Will you give me twopence?'

Regardless of C.O.S<sup>571</sup>. principles I mechanically gave her what she asked for. 'But you're unhappy, dear' she said: 'what's the trouble?'

The person I love best in all the world is going to leave me,' I replied.

'Is it yer mother or yer son?' she asked.

'Neither,' I said; 'my husband.'

'Is he with yer or have they took him away?'

'He is here at home,' I replied.

'Oh be thankful the,' she said, 'be thankful you've got him to do for. 'Tis awful to ave to put em away when they're ill and wants yer most and you know all their little ways. That's what I've 'ad to do before now.'

I stood silenced by the vision of human pain accentuated by human poverty, until I was aroused by the timid voice saying;

Are you a Catholic, dear?'

'No!' I said, 'but my mother was.'

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<sup>568</sup> *Morning Post* 21.11.1908

<sup>569</sup> Henrietta Barnett 1921 'The Place of Women in the Established Church' appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* March 23 1921 quoted in *Matters that Matter* 1930 p 341

<sup>570</sup> John Northcote (1930) *Matters that Matter* p 2

<sup>571</sup> Charity Organisation Society – their philosophy was to not give randomly to charity but to encourage those in need to work for and therefore, feel pride in their ability to provide for their own needs.

'Tis a pity she did not teach yer better. You'd be comforted now';

and then, as I stood silent, she said

'Now I'll go, as likely yer'd liefer be alone, but I'll not forget to pray for im,' and she added, 'and for you too, dear.'

And so the tramp passed on with her dirty clothing and broken boots, her unwashed body, untutored tongue, and prayerful tender heart. How often amid the crushing grief of the days that followed I thought of her praying for him, an unnamed man, and for me, an old woman whom she would never see again.<sup>572</sup>

Henrietta Barnett is remembered as a remarkable woman, not because she was a clergy wife but because she was the wife of a particular man who happened to be a clergyman, and was inspired and challenged to lead a life of reform and service of quite tremendous stature. As a single woman, she might have achieved much of what she did anyway, but her partnership with Samuel Barnett undoubtedly enhanced what she did. As to her role as a clergy wife, she was, and she did what was required. 'She did what she could' has been uttered about so many such women. Displaying 'principles of love and duty'<sup>573</sup> has been the theme of many an obituary or funeral sermon on the wife or widow of a clergyman. But Henrietta herself had very strong views about the role, a role she saw essentially as that of a partnership. This was what she had known, it was the only way for her that such a role could be fulfilled justly and honestly. It was a matter of great importance for her - not because she had any difficulty in achieving such a partnership but because she had observed other marriages where the notion of partnership, or at least its acknowledgement was entirely absent.

How often.... have I seen parsons and their wives in East London, both working, it is true but the woman doing the lion's share. I have known them lose health, opportunities of cultivation and pleasure, giving up even the time to make themselves look nice, and then I have heard the husband talk of my work, my parish, my Sunday school, my Mothers' Meeting, or my Children's Aid. Never once have I heard a bishop, or a brother-parson suggest the amendment 'our'. On the contrary, if the woman's work is referred to at all, it is generally at the tail-end of the speech, with either a note of patronage or a streak of congratulation to the parson for having been so clever as to

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<sup>572</sup> Henrietta Barnett Canon Barnett, his Life, Work and Friends p 770

<sup>573</sup> A L Le Breton (1874) A Memoir of Mrs Barbauld. p 119

obtain without 'money and without price' a parish worker who cannot resign.<sup>574</sup>

Canon Barnett could never have been accused of anything so crass or patronising. The opening words of his Parochial Report begin 'The feature of our past year...' and continuing in all his thoughts about the philosophy behind his/their parish work. However, when he comes to write about what he saw as his own failure – to attract large numbers to worship or attend services – he sees the blame as being all his own. Here is evidence of this well-developed sense of humility his wife found so irksome.

What shouts out from the pages of these reports is the enormous range of activities and societies housed within the church. Even within the five year period between two reports it is clear the extent to which the social involvement of the church increased. Some of this was due to the establishment of Toynbee Hall and the influx of energy and commitment from the University settlers, but not all the labour was imported via the settlements, inevitably, since many of the parish workers were women.

Being a clergy wife in an East London parish must have been hard in the latter part of the nineteenth century (at any time). At a period when change and development within the Church of England was defining a more sacerdotal and less paternalistic role for the clergy, and society, particularly middle class society, was still concerned with separate spheres and the role of wife and mother as being intact within the home, the traditional view of the Vicar's wife as 'lady bountiful' partway between the Manor House and the cottagers had lost most of its credibility, even in the villages of the post-feudal English countryside. Women had been asserting themselves and their role in the reform and protest movements of the mid-century, and although change moves slower in rural areas, cracks were appearing in the structure of the country vicarage and the role of its inhabitants. In the city however, with none of the traditional certainties of the village, the migrant workers found freedom, from paternalism, from the long-held domination of the squire and the church, from tied housing and rural poverty. But it was freedom at a price, for with it went the supportive arms of a close community, the structure of the country year with its festivals, its periods of intense activity, backbreaking work and subsequent celebration. Gone was any image of the church as the centre of the

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<sup>574</sup> Henrietta Barnett (1930) Matters that Matter

community, belonging to all, even if never entered except to mark rites of passage. Even the campaign early in the century to infuse one million pounds into the building of London churches was a cosmetic device. The city may have been seen as wicked and Godless but the building of neo-Gothic edifices could not heal the wounded soul of a mass of people thrown together, estranged from home, security, native land, language and culture. There was a role for the church among such a gathering of people but it was a different and a difficult role and it was not going to be achieved by traditional clergy. Hence the great respect eventually won by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, for in their joint role they were able to provide a working partnership that provided the spiritual, as well as the social, outreach that such a society required. Henrietta finds a place in another woman's acknowledgement of the role of women in the church, in Jerusha Richardson's Women of the Church of England published in 1907 she is described in a chapter entitled 'Leaders of Social Movements':

There can be no better proof of the capacity of the English Church, to respond to and to provoke soul-wants in the English people than the existence of Mrs Henrietta Barnett ..wife of the Rev. S.A. Barnett, successively Vicar of St Jude's, Whitechapel.....'

The chapter goes on to list titles of articles she had written and offices she had held or was holding in the wide range of organisations concerned with welfare and reform. It continues:

The very hearty reception she met with at the recent Church Congress (1907) when she spoke on the Ethics of the Poor Law, shows the importance attributed to her views on the scientific treatment of poverty by those Church people who are most anxious for the extension of the Church's usefulness and most desirous that religion shall dignify and direct all of social and political, as well as all of individual life...She is a Churchwoman whose efforts are constructive and instructive rather than tempering and consoling<sup>575</sup>.

Samuel Barnett saw himself as very fortunate in his choice of wife. He was the 'tempering and consoling' element of their partnership but, however they divided up their relationship, however they complemented each other in their personalities and their gifts, they were an inescapably successful partnership and an example of a truly

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<sup>575</sup> Jerusha D Richardson (1907) Women of the Church of England p 336-7



remarkable clergy marriage. Companionate they undoubtedly were, sharing so much both in their working and their personal life, travelling, visiting friends, going to the theatre, walking and marvelling at the wonders of creation. They loved each other deeply, from Samuel's first seeking her out, until Henrietta's 'crushing grief' at his death and beyond into her widowhood. Their view of marriage was totally remarkable in its complete unity in all the 'big issues' of life. They were aware of each other's differing personalities, conscious of each others propensity to habits that might irritate, sensitive to each other's low and depressed moments as much as being able to share and rejoice in each other's triumphs and successes. According to the demands of the marriage service, they clearly supported each other in sickness and health, they were never really subjected to poverty for themselves but neither did they have time or patience for riches, they kept only to each other insofar as anyone with a public life can do, they loved and honoured each other, but I do wonder if the word 'obey' formed part of their marriage service and somehow, if it did, would think that Henrietta would have found a way to interpret it to suit both their needs.

## Part IV Conclusion.

I had not anticipated any possibility of oral history to inform this thesis. However, I did have the privilege of being able to visit and interview the great-granddaughter of Catharine and Archie Tait. It was a bonus, and from it I was able to take images and perceptions of Catharine Tait that would otherwise have been denied me. It was a sharp reminder of the limitations of research material. It was also a reinforcement of what I had been told before<sup>576</sup>, that, in interrogating our sources we must listen for different meanings from the past and that, while we may not have new material, we may have new questions and these questions may lead us on to different truths and more fruitful conclusions.

In the early 1990's, Joanna Trollope, granddaughter of author Anthony, published a book 'The Rector's Wife' which was popular and televised. Fiction though it is (see thoughts on use of fiction in historical narratives in 'Living Pages'), it presents a study of a clergy marriage from a number of angles. Characters within it present their own perceptions of what such a marriage, and more particularly the wife in a clergy marriage, ought to be. There is an interesting exchange in it between the wife and her husband's Bishop about her role:

The Bishop looked at her. 'What about a wife's sense of service?'

Anna looked back. 'A sense of service to God is one thing. It's independent, you chose it, you choose how you fulfil it. A sense of service to a husband who has chosen God is quite another. Handmaidens of the Lord have a much better time of it than handmaidens of husbands.'<sup>577</sup>

It was significant that in a novel written in the 1990's the issue of separation of duty between God and husband should still be worthy of comment. Joanna Trollope, herself from a clergy family, could write with feeling about these pressures in an age when the church was no longer the centre of national existence but the position of a woman, as wife and as individual, was still not totally resolved. Was it because the woman quoted was a clergy wife that this acceptance of individuality had not been recognised? If that

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<sup>576</sup> Anna Davin (1995) Women's History Conference, SOAS.

<sup>577</sup> Joanna Trollope (1991) The Rector's Wife. P 256

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was so then, it is clear that what I had begun to investigate and seek out in the lives of my eighteenth century women, and pursued through women in the reign of Queen Victoria was, and still is, a live issue.

The above illustrates one perception of an aspect of clergy marriage. My principal aim has been to study Victorian clergy marriage through the more detailed biographical studies in Part III, but also, in Part II ('Chapter and Verse') in the wider range of different marriages and clergy lifestyles, and to discern whether such marriages were greatly different from other marriages within a similar timespan and social setting. While acknowledging the inevitable variety of women, husbands, situations and marriages, I would have to conclude that indeed a clergy marriage is different, and that this difference can be charted through expectation, opportunity and motivation. That the expectations are extremely high, even unreasonable, can be ascertained from the literature described in the chapter 'Very Great Expectations' as well as in the biographies of women quoted in 'Rectory Culture' and 'Not always made in Heaven'. These expectations have been central to an image which women have, in general, lived up to. This is where the exhortational literature meets the memoir or biography. That some women fail to meet the standard is unlikely to be acknowledged in such literature, one is therefore, bound to await the later or more frank disclosures of such women as Annie Besant or to give some credence to the likely factual basis of fictional accounts such as Paget's 'Owlet of Owlestone Edge'.

Opportunity, I would regard as an immensely important feature of clergy marriage. Again, it is inevitable that not all women would have sought, or been capable of responding to the kind of opportunities afforded by the role of clergy wife to some of the women in this study. At the beginning of the period, these could be as far-ranging as those of the clergy, covering every aspect of community life, or as narrow as might be found in a predominantly social context of limited visiting and association with the gentry. What is significant in this area is that, while the role of the clergy became more confined as gradually many of his secular and pastoral duties were taken over by other professionals (lawyers, doctors, teachers, social workers, the judiciary), this multiplicity of demands for a variety of skills remained, in the (unwritten) job description of the clergy wife who continued to act as pharmacist, almoner, teacher and social worker, in some cases well beyond the period of this research. Prochaska states that 'most female

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reformers hailed (Christianity) as an emancipating influence.<sup>578</sup> Thus, the empowerment of clergy wives, in a position that allowed or impelled them to move into the public sphere, is of great importance, as must be the skills acquired and practised as a result of being put in such a position.

When it comes to motivation both the author of Hints to a Clergyman's Wife, and George Herbert in his book The Country Parson, are clear that it will be a woman's personal faith as well as her love for her husband (and promise to obey him) that will be the principal motivator in her life. Huge amounts were written during the century, particularly with the rise of the evangelicals, about the immense importance of women's influence over men (confined within the private sphere of the home) but it is hard to see how this confinement can be applied to clergy wives whose home itself is neither private nor confined. Therefore, I see the potent combination of personal faith and love for a husband as being the principal motivators, and in many cases, the acknowledgement of a common cause or partnership yielding satisfaction to both parties, which would render such a union 'more than a marriage'.

One might venture here to suggest that this could be said of many other marriages and partnerships which were not those of the clergy. Indeed the political partnership and marriage of Sidney and Beatrice Webb holds within it many of the elements of the companionate marriages described in this research; there was mutual love and affection, respect, a shared faith (socialism rather than Christianity) and a common cause. They, like the Taites, were acutely aware of their good fortune in their partnership and their duty to do good as a result of it. Compare therefore Catharine Tait's comments: 'being blessed and happy ourselves must make us more conscious than ever to do all that we can for others'<sup>579</sup> with those of Sidney Webb: '... he does not hesitate to express an almost childlike gratitude for his good luck in life "We ought to do good work, we have been so amazingly fortunate."<sup>580</sup> But I would still contend that there is a difference and that which separates the clergy marriage from all other loving partnerships is the requirement to do good and to lead the exemplary life because of the nature of the priest's calling and his ordination promises.

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<sup>578</sup> Frank Prochaska (1980) Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England p 12

<sup>579</sup> Letter from Catharine to Archibald Tait - Tait papers.

<sup>580</sup> Beatrice Webb (1975) Our Partnership p 10

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I would say that unqualified dedication is the best equipment for a Minister's wife. She must not only be in love with her husband, she must also be in love with Christ and His Church.<sup>581</sup>

In terms of evidence for 'more than a marriage', I would offer both Tait and Barnett as fulfilling the necessary criteria. Catharine Tait's marriage became her life's work. Although her husband cited the orphanage she founded as 'the crowning labour of her life', and although in terms of a lasting memory of her, her narrative on the death of her daughters would certainly count as such, I believe neither of these, significant though they were, can be separated from the seamless garment of her marriage and her life. If, as we have discussed, the framing and fashioning of her early years provided training for the life she was to lead, this could only remain a limited contribution. It would have served as well for the wife of any poor curate or even moderately successful rector within a town or country parish such as her own father. Beyond that, the extraordinary route taken by her husband's career, and therefore, her own life, would have defied any formal preparation. One could argue that she, being an able woman, was carried along by the circumstances. One could also argue that, being married to an able and ambitious man, and being in a loving and supportive partnership with him, she had all that was needed to meet anything that fate and or the church might require of them. She undoubtedly rose to all the occasions that such preferment, and other circumstances put in her way. She proved herself able to dine with and entertain royalty and poor clergy alike, to maintain an extended family network, to read widely and keep herself intellectually informed, to organise others, as in the Diocesan Women's Association and the development of the orphanage, to continue throughout her life to worship daily and to regularly visit the sick and the residents of the workhouse, to have such a grasp of accounts and financial management as to astound others but meanwhile be in touch with even the smallest undertaking and account for which she had taken responsibility, to bring up a family (as well as cope with the loss of six of her nine children), to retain, to the end a joyful and companionate but loving relationship with her husband and support him in all his efforts and still, at the end of it retain her personal faith and integrity, never departing from the adherence she had established as a young woman. One might argue that this is too exemplary a catalogue and that it is based principally on the hagiographical accounts of loved ones, but that is to do her a disservice. All of these things can be substantiated by

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<sup>581</sup> Anon. *The Minister's Wife* (1964)

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hard evidence. She was a remarkable woman and while one might want to dismiss any tribute from her husband at her death as being inevitably biased, there are other accounts which substantiate the fact that she was his rock and anchor and that their marriage was extraordinary:

If... any vindication were necessary of the principle of a married clergy and, above all, of the expediency of a bishop having a wife, the life and character of Catharine Tait would serve as the highest justification. Not only to her husband in his charge and office, but to the Church at large, the blessing of a career and nature such as hers is inspiring and consoling.<sup>582</sup>

If the Tait marriage meets my requirements in terms of mutual affection, support and involvement, then surely the Barnett marriage, although very different, meets the same criteria. In essence, theirs was much less obviously a clergy marriage, in that the clerical aspect was not ultimately that which dominated. Barnett was an unconventional clergyman. He was not ambitious in the manner of Tait (his wife railed at his propensity to excessive humility). Henrietta was not a supportive woman in the way of Catharine Tait. Neither she nor her husband had had the benefit of the clergy childhood, no learning at mother or father's knee. Samuel was hardly gifted in any of the requirements of a parish priest and yet he could motivate and inspire others to great endeavour and, as well as countless social and cultural initiatives and reforms, he managed to achieve the setting up of Toynbee Hall and the establishment of the University Settlement movement.

Nor was Henrietta cast in the mould of a Martha rather than a Mary. She was a thinker and doer and not necessarily a housewife at all, though this did not prevent her writing quantities of advice literature for young women on the running of a home, bringing up children etc. They had no children of their own, nor a great extended family but were, through their own personality and brilliance, able to attract great minds and interesting colleagues to contribute talents to their many initiatives. Their support for each other was without restriction. All Barnett's annual reports from St Jude's are written in the first person plural and wherever Henrietta might seek a disclaimer from credit (as in Toynbee Hall) he would be quick to countermand this. However, they did also have combined projects and co-wrote books together. Like Catharine Tait, there is a clear indication that

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<sup>582</sup> Jerusha Richardson (1907) Women of the Church of England. p275

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it was Henrietta who was the strong one in the marriage and there are plenty of quotations to support this and yet there is the anomaly that, at his death, the biography she wrote precluded any attempt to write anything separate for herself. She outlived him by twenty years and continued to achieve much on her own, continuing in the field they had shared throughout their life together: 'The death of her husband was a great blow to her but she did not relax her social and philanthropic activities.'<sup>583</sup>

But this epithet of 'more than a marriage' should not be applied, if it is to have any validity, simply to such high profile marriages and much celebrated people. That that which pertains to such couples can be, and is, replicated within a much wider sample, is possible to see if one uses all the tools outlined in the previous chapters (memoirs, biographies, diaries). This includes evidence, hitherto discarded as too hagiographical and subjective. In the memorials and funeral sermons of clergy wives one encounters example after example of women who were devoted, supportive and fulfilled all the requirements of that most demanding of exemplary texts, *Hints to a Clergyman's Wife*. We may not ultimately be able to discern the happiness of the marriage, but the notion of partnership and commitment is clear enough in so many instances: courage in the face of danger and tragedy; faithful support in all the demands of the pastoral life; initiatives *and enterprises to enable and encourage the parishioners, and others beyond, not only* to self-help and independence but also to personal faith and commitment – one could almost suggest a shared ministry.

Given the requirement to set my writing within its appropriate historical context, it was inevitable that change over time would be a major feature. This was true both within the development of the Church of England and also within the lives of women. It is the bringing together of these two strands which is core to both the general aspects of the work and the more specific life experiences of particular women. I am chronicling *therefore, changing understandings of role and expectation of women within an* organisation and alongside male partners whose roles and expectations were also moving on – a veritable double helix of transformations. It might seem, therefore, that *some changes were not so monumental* given the climate at the conclusion of the period, but it is essential to consider those things, both to see the need for change and

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583 *Hampstead and Highgate Express*. 19.6.1996 (Sixtieth anniversary of her death) p 4

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ultimately to bring it to effect. Also, change over time that is not revolutionary in its instant impact, needs to be looked at from sufficient distance to be able to bring its beginning and its fruition into the picture. Then one can perceive the magnitude of advance and consider its implications. I would cite in this area of major change the urbanisation of the population, the professionalisation and the decline in influence of the Church of England and the several pieces of legislation which affected the lives of women. When studying change it is also interesting to observe those areas where change fails to happen and to reflect upon the reason for this, particularly the 'trickle-down' effect where attitudes and perceptions move at a slower rate than the recorded evidence of the changes themselves. I would, at this point, have to include some residual perceptions of what is to be expected of women, of wives, of the clergy wife and the still heavy bureaucracy of the Anglican Church. The reasons... here we enter, once again, areas which have not been able to shake free from their male dominated history.

Within this framework of change, the differences between rural and urban life have played a part, with the loss of the parish structure in urban areas and with it the social hierarchy and any sense of deference. Even within the rural community the rise of the dissenting denominations, and in cities the power of Methodism and Roman Catholicism upset the structure of religious conformity and placed the urban vicarage and the rural rectory (and therefore, their occupants) in a less commanding position than before. Within the Church of England there had also been change – in the education and then the training of the clergy, in the increase of services and provision of organised weekday activities and, with the rise of evangelism, the increase in visiting, parish workers, prayer meetings and an expectation of a social as well as a religious involvement between clergy and congregation. However, while huge changes took place within the church and within the lives of women there were, and are, elements that have not changed at all; the overall expectations, the tied housing and its semi-public use, the slender stipend, the change of status at the death of an incumbent, the requirement, still, for wife and family to lead an exemplary lifestyle. But it is not at this point my place to make comparisons between the women in this study and their contemporary sisters, tempting though it is to do so. The changes I wish to note are those which occurred within and between the church and society as well as between men and women.



If the changes in educational opportunity were great, they did not necessarily, as we have discovered in the chapter 'Clever Girl at the Vicarage', reach all girls within middle class or clergy families. While battles were being fought, and eventually won, for universal education, there were parental prejudices which overrode such victories in some families. From Catherine Cappe to Edith Davidson and Emily Davies to Henrietta Barnett there were women who regretted the lack of seriousness in their education. These were, undoubtedly, strong women who, through force of character, were able to achieve great things but the chilling thought is how many equally intelligent women did not possess the strength to overcome resistance or apathy in respect of their right to a good education.

By the end of the period there was compulsory education for girls and women were able to enrol in higher education. While this was an immense achievement it did not necessarily indicate that a period spent at Oxford or Cambridge would be viewed with seriousness by a young woman's family, or that even the woman herself would consider it a means to an end rather than the end itself. (See Mary Paley Marshall note<sup>263</sup>). Margaret Gatty had not been able to pursue a career as an academic, she and many other clergy wives were able to write and thereby make a mark in one of the few acceptable areas for women outside the home. The other acceptable area for women was, as we have discovered, philanthropy and in this the clergy wife and daughter were inextricably involved. The benefits of this were long-term but considerable:

The successes of women in philanthropy helped to soften the blow when they turned to these employments which would have been the preserve of men in an earlier time.<sup>584</sup>

It is significant however, also, in addition to Welldon's contention that the children of clergy marriages have achieved more in terms of public service than those of any other professional body, the conclusions of Yamaguchi in her work on clergy daughters and my own findings in the women I have studied and in biographical dictionaries have revealed much the same, (as indicated in 'The Clever Girl at the Vicarage'), that an upbringing according to 'principles of love and duty' can indeed be far reaching in its influence, and the calls to service, either within the parish to the aid of father, brother husband or in the world beyond were the legacy of this upbringing.

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The inevitable alteration of status over this period is another mark of change. We have observed the clergy move up the social scale, subsequent to their increased education; we have seen how they have been absorbed into the social milieu of the country gentry and that which replaced it, the middle class repository of respectability and moral tone; and in the dying years of the period we have begun to see its decline in influence and social importance, particularly in urban parishes. Although their personal status did not diminish, and therefore, this decline is not immediately obvious in the lives of the principal women in my study, it is, nevertheless, there in the background. There is indication that the Rev. William Marsh, father of Catherine Marsh, had suffered lack of preferment and general disapproval because of his evangelical tendencies and the anti-establishment nature of some of the causes he had espoused. Evangelical clergy alongside Dissenters were acknowledged to have lower social status than their Anglican colleagues. The Marsh family had lived in country rectories as well as the more fashionable parish of Leamington Spa. Their moves had been determined more by Rev Marsh's health and ability to cope with a heavy workload than by questions of patronage. Finance had for them been at times a problem, but they had lived in one after another of a succession of substantial vicarages and rectories in rural parishes and Catherine had moved with her family, fitting in as a much loved spinster daughter, sister, aunt to her father and the clergy husbands of her sister and her niece. But at her death, she was at the end of the line. There remained no clerical relations, her niece herself was now a clergy widow and would have to move on to allow the next incumbent to move into the Feltwell Vicarage.

Within a few years the Great War was to come and with it all the attendant upheaval to the social structure of the land. Following the War the huge rural parsonages attached to small rural parishes would become an encumbrance to hard-pressed congregations. Eventually they would be demolished or sold on as country residences to the newly prosperous or converted to institutions. If the parish remained, it might move into a grouping with others to increase its viability and the clergy family would have a wider geographical spread with which to concern themselves. If anything did live beyond Catherine Marsh's death it was not so much her many books and pamphlets but her convalescent home at Brighton and the raised awareness of the plight of migrant

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<sup>584</sup> Frank Prochaska (1980) *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* p 224

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workers, soldiers, convicts and others on the margins of society whose cause she had fought for throughout her lifetime. Evangelism is personal, faith is not transferable, it only remains within the lifetime of the recipient, but social reform has a longer 'shelf-life', an enduring quality which may have less dramatic impact but nevertheless, leaves its mark.

Samuel Barnett eventually moved away from his beloved Whitechapel, to be Canon first at Bristol and then at Westminster Abbey. It was an acknowledgement of respect to a man who, with his wife, had achieved immense things in an alien and difficult community. I have already chronicled many of the Barnetts' successes, a whole range of social improvements and cultural achievements, gained during his incumbency of St Jude's, within the Whitechapel community and also in Hampstead. These long outlived the couple, and yet, they too were in the realm of social reform not religious revival. Their status grew, not because of their advancement within the church so much as because of their own personal stature as campaigners and reformers. Their influence lived on in the lives of those engaged in the University Settlement Movement, in town planning inspired by Hampstead Garden Suburb and in institutions like the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

So what of the Taits, the most elevated of these clergy families? Their connections had always been with the gentry and Archie's elevation had merely confirmed that. Not that he gained preferment due to his connections, indeed, as has been said 'he had to fight his way through the world unaided and without patronage.'<sup>585</sup> However, he and, more particularly, Catharine, were well-connected and, despite their religious advancement, would have lived in the upper echelons of society. Tait was able to overcome his qualms about his own ambitious nature and accept the preferment he was offered. He did not do so, one can certainly believe, so much for power as for the opportunity to bring in change and reform within the Church of England. Even so, a study of his primacy published in 1969, has as its title The Victorian Church in Decline. Tait's achievements were, despite this, contained within the history of the Church. He had steered it through some difficult times but his reputation was as a good man rather than a great one. And what of his wife? We have already encountered<sup>586</sup> the suggestion that she remains less well known than Trollope's contemporary fictional clergy wife, Mrs Proudie. She did however, leave the legacy of children. Edith, her daughter, who was eventually to

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<sup>585</sup> Anon. 1883-89 21 Pamphlets on the Anglican Church. Archibald Tait. p1

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become wife of Archbishop Davidson, undoubtedly brought with her to Lambeth much of the nurturing, the framing and fashioning of her own growing years. It was Edith, who was able to enjoy with her husband, the innovation of a period of retirement away from the Primacy.<sup>587</sup> Her sister Lucy remains entangled in the history of the Benson family, unconventional in lifestyle but retaining always elements of her upbringing and, at her father's death, seeking out Octavia Hill in order to learn about housing for the poor. Only the youngest daughter, Agnes was able to continue the line and leave a Tait grandchild before her tragically premature death. Mrs Colville, her granddaughter was Deputy Lieutenant of Wiltshire at the time I interviewed her. The clergy connection had ceased but the commitment to duty and public service remains.

As I indicated in the introduction, there are areas which relate to clergy wives and daughters which were not relevant to my three principal subjects. Research has shown that these were significant though sensitive to deal with. On the subject of dysfunctional marriage, it was not difficult to conclude that though this must have been the case in some instances, the likelihood of its being put into the public domain was very small, except in cases involving well researched and public figures such as Annie Besant and Minnie Benson. While Annie Besant was prepared to discuss her own failed marriage in her autobiography, it was left to the biographies of the Benson offspring to indicate that all had not been well in the household of Archbishop Edward White Benson. Herein lies a difference too, for whereas Besant's situation was resolved through painful divorce and separation from one of her children, the question did not arise in the Benson household where incompatibility was implied rather than acknowledged. Clergy divorce was rare because divorce was rare and the clergy had more reason than most, in their exemplary position, to preserve a façade of harmony to the watching world outside the vicarage.

The other sensitive issue that threads its way through the lives of many is that of clergy poverty. As I have commented, few clergy wives disclose it in their writings and yet the proliferation of charities advertising aid for impoverished clergy and their families indicate that this must have been a problem. From the minimal stipends of unbeneficed curates at the mercy of pluralist clergy at the beginning of the period, the expensive anomalies of Queen Anne's Bounty and the agricultural depressions of the late years of the century

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<sup>586</sup> in Margaret Watt (1943) The Parson's Wife in History

with greatly reduced the income from glebe lands, the causes of clergy poverty were many and resolution from diocese or any central authority was not forthcoming. It was not until the next century that pensions for clergy were introduced and later still that provision was made for clergy widows. The issue of the tied house remains, and the need to move on swiftly at the death of the incumbent. One reason that clergy wives have not dwelt, during the period of this research (and to some extent later), on the difficulties of poverty is explained, I believe, by the sense of disloyalty and failure such disclosures would imply. I would also have to suggest that, from all I have read, there is a strong sense of mutual appreciation by the church community and vicarage families which is sometimes able to surmount the difficulties of insufficient income.

There have been some strong threads uniting the women in this research, particularly the three principal subjects. Prime among them has been their involvement in social reform and philanthropy. Martha Vicinus in her introduction to The Widening Sphere states that: 'philanthropy had traditionally been women's particular concern, and its definition during the nineteenth century was broadened to include virtually every major social problem.'<sup>587</sup> Living in poor cities or central London would have presented Tait and Barnett with a vast range of social problems with which either to engage or to ignore and the latter was never a possibility. In rural Kent, Marsh might not have expected to have been presented with anything beyond the inevitable rural poverty, but the invasion of the Crystal Palace-building navvies put an end to that and opened her eyes to what became a lifetime of involvement with social problems. The particular weapons used by these three women, recruitment and fundraising, political lobbying and legislation, practical help and evangelism, and in all cases raising awareness, were from an armoury of skills and abilities which had been refined far beyond anything they had learned in their youth. All three were immensely adept at identifying a need and responding to it. Their high profile and reputation was such that creativity and leadership were a requirement and any commitment made had to be sustained – there was no possibility of short-term but generous gestures. While Mort states: 'Philanthropic work was seen as a natural and

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<sup>587</sup> Archbishop Randall Davidson was the first Archbishop of Canterbury to take retirement.

<sup>588</sup> Martha Vicinus (1980) The Widening Sphere. Introduction.

socially justifiable extension of women's domestic role in the public sphere<sup>589</sup> I believe these women's commitment extended well beyond this.

One of the issues I had sought to address through this research was that of women's empowerment through the duties and obligations of their role as clergy wives and daughters. I would have to conclude that this was indeed so, though whether women of the time saw it as such I am unsure. It is undoubtedly true that involvement in the community was a requirement for all women in the vicarage, whether following the tenets of George Herbert, the handbook writers of the mid-century or the biblical exhortations to engage in the social gospel. As I concluded in the chapter 'Very Great Expectations', the requirements for clergy wives are implicit in the set-down requirements for clergy. Not that these are necessarily acknowledged by them, but there are sufficient accounts, telling of sustained work by clergy wives in their parishes, to override this invisibility. (It is even acknowledged by some that there are some things better accomplished by a clergy wife or daughter). It is also true that women did learn useful transferable skills in the 'framing and fashioning' environment of the vicarage. Whether learned at a mother's knee, by observation of a father, or through trial, error or bitter experience, skills of management, negotiation and communication were the stuff of parish organisation, the means to the successful provision of garden parties, social events or the large scale entertainment of visitors at confirmations. Prochaska describes the running of a philanthropic society and suggests that it can be 'compared to the running of a family ... men were to provide the intelligence and direction, women 'the better heart, the truer intimation of the right;<sup>590</sup> and not least the unflagging industry that kept the institution together'. While I could not agree that all the women studied would have conceded that men alone had provided the intelligence and direction in their several philanthropic ventures, they would, most certainly have acknowledged whose was the unflagging industry.

There are consequently limitations to this empowerment. Among the women I have studied, Barnett, Besant and Creighton embraced the suffrage cause, and all of them crossed boundaries, pushed further back male-imposed limitations or redefined their role

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<sup>589</sup> Frank Mort (1987) Dangerous Sexualities

<sup>590</sup> Theodore Parker (1853) A sermon on the public function of women quoted in Frank Prochaska (1980) Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England p 17

in order to achieve what they felt was important. Barnett, however, was still obliged to recruit male sponsors to further her planning application for the Hampstead Garden Suburb, and Gatty sacrificed her own interests and those of her daughters, to fund her sons at public school. Also, it was not, during the period of this research, acceptable for women to preach in the Church of England. Catherine Marsh did preach, in meetings, sometimes to large numbers of people, but she was, as I have indicated, adamant that she would never do so in the presence of an ordained clergyman. In areas such as the suffrage she was ambivalent, yet she had no problem with engaging even the Prime Minister in debate on political matters close to her heart, but a female ordained ministry would, I suspect, have shocked her. Ten years before her death, the following tribute was published in a tract by the Rev H C G Moule on The Public Ministry of Women<sup>591</sup> (he was adamantly against it ) but:

Many a holy woman renowned for her public utterances, has yet, I am sure, done more by her private ones. I may name two illustrious names which will shine forever among the constellation of those who turn many to righteousness – Mrs F Havergal and (may she be spared long yet to her holy ministry), Miss Catherine Marsh.

He is in tune with the precepts of the evangelicals, that women's influence was strongest when used in the private sphere, and that women were the natural voice of moral issues, further borne out at the end of our period in a sermon by the Vicar of Lower Heyford:

Consider then the influence of woman, as wife in her own home. She has now reached, as I believe, the highest positions of independence assigned to her in the purpose of Almighty God, for woman was not meant to act alone. Her influence is most powerful when exerted through others. Her appointed mission and destiny is to be the companion and helpmate of her husband, the bosom on which he pillows his cares, his sympathiser in adversity, his solace in affliction, his story and comfort in every time of need: honestly, I believe this to be woman's highest mission, not because she is inferior to man, but because her chief strength is in her influence over men.<sup>592</sup>

However, not all women, even in the nineteenth century, would be satisfied with this limitation, for 'what we claim for the women in the home, we would also claim for her

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<sup>591</sup> H C G Moule (1910) The Public Ministry of Women

<sup>592</sup> Rev Vivian Lennard (1910) Woman, her power, influence and mission 21 sermons by Vicar of Lower Heyford.p 5

beyond its walls'<sup>593</sup> and, society, by conceding the moral influence to women, had inadvertently lifted the wire for women to 'use their supposedly greater spirituality as a further justification for transcending the confines of the private sphere'.<sup>594</sup> The Rev Lennard and the Rev. Moule were writing at a point when much of the social fabric around them was about to change. They were describing a perception of women and their situation that had been overtaken by reality in the lives of many of the women described in this study and beyond. For these women, their Christian faith had empowered them, the love of their husband or family had sustained them, the framing and fashioning of their upbringing had trained them, and their earnest desire to serve their fellow beings had motivated them to override any perception, and deny any limiting image, such that they found themselves on 'the ragged frontiers between public and private (which) must be recognised as a site where identity of race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation as well as gender is found'.<sup>595</sup> Frontiers, however, need to be maintained, if ground is not to be lost. If the women I have described did establish a personal identity, it has been my joy to uncover this in the process of this research, and to conclude that their position, within a marriage, and within a clergy household was, and remains, special but that we must ever be mindful to recognise and acknowledge the achievements and influence of those who are motivated by principles of love and duty.

While I have said that I did not intend to construct a comparison between these Victorian clergy wives and daughters and their present day counterparts I was struck by a paper on the internet entitled What pastors' wives wish their husbands and churches knew about them.<sup>596</sup> Certainly it is American, though some of the research has been done in England and Australia, but some of the issues raised caused me to smile – they loved their husbands and to a certain extent felt happy to be involved in their work and the commitment that it entailed, but there was the question of the exemplary lifestyle, the being permanently on show, the lack of privacy, the unreasonable expectations of parish and sometimes husband, the need for some area which is their own and in which they can have some personal satisfaction, the craving for an identity for themselves beyond

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<sup>593</sup> Florence Nightingale quoted by Edward Sieveking in Frank Mort (1987) Dangerous Sexualities p 55

<sup>594</sup> Jane Lewis 'Sexual Divisions and Social Change' in Jane Lewis (ed) (1984) Women in England 1870-1950 p 92

<sup>595</sup> Leonore Davidoff (1993) Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives in Gender and Class p 258

<sup>596</sup> John Mark Ministries (2000) What pastors' wives wish their husbands and churches knew about them <http://www.pastornet.net.au/jmm/alpt/alpt0104>



being known as 'the vicar's wife'. It is impossible not to feel a great sense of identification with these women on behalf of some other women long dead but to me still very much alive in spirit.

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