Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century

Volume I

Edited by **Mike Sanders**

WOMEN AND RADICALISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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WOMEN AND RADICALISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Volume I

Specific Controversies

Edited and with an introduction by Mike Sanders

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DEDICATION

For my father and Cathy and in memory of my mother

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

At first sight the title of this anthology, *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, appears to offer a descriptive, possibly even bland, summary of its contents. However, each of its first three words is a contested sign and precisely because of this the equanimity of the reader is, I suspect, unlikely to survive a survey of the contents page. For although, like Dickens's Mr Venus, I have attempted to arrange my 'miscellaneous' materials 'in a manner that [will] equally surprise and charm you', I am also aware that this selection may excite other, less favourable, reactions, as readers question the inclusion of some items and query the omission of others. Such reactions are both inevitable and necessary given the debate surrounding each of these key terms – 'women and radicalism'.

The problematic nature of 'women' as sign and category is a commonplace in contemporary academic discourse. Denise Riley's *Am I That Name?* succinctly summarises the difficulties attending the use of this term:

> To put it schematically: 'women' is historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories which themselves change . . . 'women' is both synchronically and diachronically erratic as a collectivity, while for the individual, 'being a woman' is also inconstant, and can't provide an ontological foundation. (1988: 1–2)

As regards the nineteenth century, current scholarship is acutely sensitive to the specific situatedness of 'women'. Questions of class, of colour, of national/regional/local identifications, of sexuality, of religious and political affiliation both complement and qualify questions of gender. Hence, it is necessary to refer to working-class women, middle-class women and aristocratic women, and each of these categories may be subdivided, and those subdivisions divided in their turm.

In what sense then is it possible to speak of 'women' in the unitary sense implied by the title? First, this collection both assumes, and in a textual sense embodies, the possibility of understanding unities as heterogeneous and internally differentiated rather than monolithic entities. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the nineteenth century saw a wide range of powerful discourses (particularly the new 'social/human' sciences) construct 'woman' as a unity. In this respect then, this anthology is consistent with the practice of its nineteenth-century subjects. Finally, and most importantly, there is a sense in which the patriarchal structures and institutions of nineteenth-century bourgeois civilisation imposed, at least in theory, unitary status on 'women' – albeit a unity which in practice was differentially inflected by those qualifiers noted in the previous paragraph. The identification of this facet of nineteenth-century society has been one of the lasting achievements of feminist scholarship. Another has been to draw attention to the rather more subversive unity produced by women's resistance to patriarchal power.

If anything, 'radicalism' is a word that is even more fraught with difficulties and ambiguities. In the period under question it can be combined with any of the following (either as prefix or suffix): plebeian, bourgeois, philosophical, Tory, middle-class, and working-class. Furthermore, working-class radicalism alone, contains a variety of currents (sometimes complementary, sometimes competing): a natural rights radicalism descending from Paine, a constitutionalist radicalism descending from Cartwright and Cobbett, a freethinking, atheistic strand represented by Carlile, Owen, Holyoake, as well as strands marked by nonconformist and even millenarian forms of Christianity. Furthermore, almost every important radical leader appears to have produced a distinct trend such that it is possible to talk of Paineite radicalism, Spencean radicalism, Carlilean radicalism, Cobbettite radicalism, to say nothing of O'Connorites, O'Brienites and Owenites.

Faced with such a proliferation of labels it is tempting to conclude that 'radicalism' is a hopelessly imprecise term which ought to be abandoned. However, 'radicalism' remains a term that is both necessary and meaningful because a number of factors combined to secure its unity, albeit one based on heterogeneous elements. First, there was radicalism's own sense of itself as a diverse yet inclusive identity. Second, there was the practical unity which existed between its various currents. Despite the existence of discrete national organisations, programmes and leaderships, memberships at the local level frequently overlapped and the practical demands of organisation,

such as meeting rooms, gave rise to cross-organisational co-operation. Finally, unity was to some extent given by the hostility of non-radical forces. Conservatives frequently deployed 'radical' as a blanket term of abuse and perhaps unsurprisingly those who were abused in this way began to identify more closely with each other as a result.

The titular conjunction which joins 'women' to 'radicalism' is an equally multivalent sign. The title and thus focus of these volumes is not 'Women *in* Radicalism', but 'Women *and* Radicalism' and by extension and/or implication 'Radicalism and Women'. In this context the 'and' aspires to be the means by which its adjacent keywords might be brought into meaningful dialogue. It is the act of intellectual faith which makes these volumes possible – the belief that 'women' and 'radicalism' are not mutually exclusive terms.

Between them, the four volumes of this anthology cover the period from 1799 to 1870. During this time Britain was transformed into a predominantly industrial society and the changes associated with industrialisation provide the single most significant context for the writings contained in this anthology. Alongside this epochal change there are many important political and social events that provide a more immediate context for specific texts. These include the Napoleonic Wars, the post-war agitation for reform and its suppression, the 1832 Reform Bill and the 1834 New Poor Law, the rise and decline of Owenism and Chartism, the European Revolutions of 1848 and the second Reform Act of 1867. For the first forty years or so of the nineteenth century, working-class women were extensively involved in many radical movements. Conversely, the 1850s witnessed the beginnings of an organised and, initially, largely middle-class feminist movement with the activities of the 'Langham Place Circle', and the formation of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women in 1859.

Despite these changes and upheavals it is possible to trace certain continuities with regard to the position of women and these are given by the first three pieces in this anthology which deal with work, religion and marriage, respectively. These three themes persist throughout the nineteenth century and are central components in the wider debate concerning woman's nature and capabilities, which was given particular urgency by the social changes wrought by industrialisation. The organisation of this anthology reflects these key themes. The first volume examines a number of discrete moments in broadly chronological order. It aims to give an overview of some of the main historical changes occurring in this period and focuses

in particular on the decade between 1833 and 1843 which marked the highpoint of working-class women's involvement with radicalism. The second volume reprints material from two works by an important woman radical intellectual, Frances Wright, who was influential within both US and British radicalism. The *Course of Popular Lectures* (1829) is an important text in the history of free thought, while *England, The Civilizer* (1848) is simultaneously a work of radical history, philosophy of history and a utopian prospectus. Volume III focuses on the debates surrounding marriage, sexuality and the family. It examines the differences and similarities between two competing intellectual currents within working-class radicalism – Owenite gender radicalism and a rather more traditional gender conservatism. The former is represented by Robert Owen, Robert Dale Owen and Frances Morrison, while the latter is represented by William Cobbett and William Lovett. The final volume reprints John Duguid Milne's *Industrial Employment of Women in the Middle and Lower Ranks* (1870). As its title suggests this text is concerned with extending the employment opportunities available to women and, therefore, it revisits the subject of the work which opens the anthology, Mary Anne Radcliffe's *The Female Advocate* (1799).

REFERENCE

Riley, D. (1988) *Am I That Name?*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Volume I

SPECIFIC CONTROVERSIES

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INTRODUCTION
Specific Controversies

MARY ANNE RADCLIFFE

Mary Anne Radcliffe's *The Female Advocate; or an attempt to recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation*, provides a good example of the complex, sometimes contradictory, range of attitudes and discourses within which radical opinions are identifiable, and out of which more sharply differentiated radical positions may emerge in later texts.[1] Radcliffe's text also reminds us of the particular difficulties experienced by women who wanted to initiate or contribute to *public* debate. Radcliffe's prefatory remarks 'To The Reader' emphasise her educational disadvantages, her reluctance to publish, indeed her 'timidity' in this matter. Crucially, she disavows any notion of personal ambition: 'The author, at the same time, wishes it to be understood, that she has not been stimulated, from vain and ambitious views, to appear in print, but rather from the pure philanthropic motive of throwing in her humble mite towards the much-wished-for relief of these most pitiable objects of distress' **[42]**. This apologetic, defensive, self-effacing tone – sometimes, perhaps, as much strategic ruse as felt experience – is a conspicuous feature of this genre (witness the female correspondents to *The Pioneer* over thirty years later).

The problem confronting Radcliffe is that of legitimising or authorising her intervention. In part she seeks to resolve this problem by flattering her intended (male) audience with an appeal to its benevolence (which she identifies as a national characteristic) and to 'reason, justice, and truth' **[42–5]**. This appeal is complemented by a comparison of the relative positions of women and slaves. There has been, Radcliffe notes, an investigation into the slave trade, so why not an inquiry into the condition of 'the poor, unfortunate women of our own nation' **[92–3]**? This use of the woman–slave analogy has much in common with the Tory–Radical 'factory slave'

rhetoric which emerged in later campaigns for factory reform, and is suggestive of the ideological resources that supporters of women's rights found in the campaign against slavery. However, the most important discourse of legitimation within Radcliffe's text is that of Evangelical Christianity. *The Female Advocate* consistently appeals to an impeccably orthodox, Evangelical reading of Christianity, emphasising consciousness of sin and the consequent need for repentance and forgiveness, in order to enlist readerly support for the cause of women prostitutes in particular. Radcliffe not only uses Evangelical Christianity to discuss (and defend) prostitutes but also argues that 'Male usurpation' rather than 'female viciousness' is its major cause. This illustrates Jane Rendall's assessment of Evangelicalism in relation to women, '. . . politically . . . [its] message was conservative; socially its effects were ambiguous and contradictory' (Rendall 1985: 75).

This strategy of seeming to operate within existing discourses, of claiming no more than has been previously allowed is suggested by Radcliffe's subtitle, '*an attempt to recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation*'. This ostensible 'conservative' appeal, the restoration of 'lost' historical rights, echoes the popular constitutionalist strand within English radicalism which is frequently seen as less amenable to discourses of women's rights than its rationalist, 'natural rights' counterpart (Epstein 1994: 23). It is certainly the case that Radcliffe carefully distances herself from the latter whilst not entirely denouncing it. For example, she refers to 'the Amazonian spirit of a Wolstonecraft [sic]' and yet offers a partial defence of the same **[43]**. Radcliffe insists that she demands 'not power, but protection' for women, and claims 'happiness' not equality as the right of women **[43–4]**. In short, she calls on men to fulfil their duties towards women.

For Radcliffe, men owe women a duty of protection. Some women are fortunately well protected by their menfolk but Radcliffe wants to see this kind of protection extended to women in general. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the reason women require protection is that they live in a world of male perils, beset by improvident and insensitive husbands and mercenary suitors. Women require greatest protection in the area of employment where 'the grievous precedent of men usurping females' occupations' continues apace **[57]**.

Radcliffe is highly critical of those 'avaricious, *and . . . effeminate tradesmen*' who have usurped those branches of trade which, she believes, belong rightfully to women alone **[62]**. Such men, she argues, deprive women of the means of supporting themselves and

their dependants. She even raises the possibility of boycotting such traders, only to dismiss it as a laughable prospect.

> Suppose no lady would suffer herself to be served, in the shops of these effeminate traders, by any of the short-clothed gentry, would it not be a means of compelling all those who chuse to carry on the tragi-comic farce, to effect the business under the disguise of gown and petticoat? **[63]**

A similar tactic of consumer boycott or 'exclusive dealing' was, of course, to become part of the armoury of working-class struggle in the nineteenth century. Radcliffe contends that the displacement of female labour by male labour is 'of very long standing' and she attributes it to the expansion of 'manufactures and commerce'. In an incisive analysis which plots the interactions of class and gender, Radcliffe argues that the middle-class tradesman's need to demonstrate his 'credit' requires him to remove his wife and daughters from the sphere of work into that of leisure **[65]**. Later she extends and sharpens this analysis by arguing that the satisfaction of masculine bourgeois pride (the desire to 'outvie' one's neighbour) depends upon raising daughters to be "fine ladies" **[76]**. Given the vicissitudes of middle-class life, such an aspiration, argues Radcliffe, amounts to an unconscionable gamble on the future.

Radcliffe accepts that the majority of occupations necessarily and rightfully belong to men. However, precisely because of this, she argues that 'women ought to be permitted to occupy the remaining few [occupations]' because the net result of depriving women of these occupations is to increase prostitution **[88]**. Throughout *The Female Advocate* Radcliffe argues that economic compulsion not moral depravity is the major cause of prostitution. Women become prostitutes, she writes, '*not* from vicious inclinations, but the absolute necessity of bartering their virtue for bread' **[50]**. This unenviable choice of 'vice or death' is forced on individual women as a consequence of women collectively being displaced from their rightful forms of employment.

The prostitute provides Radcliffe with a paradigmatic figure of female oppression. Economically displaced and socially marginalised, exploited and unprotected, the plight of the prostitute presents an extreme form of female vulnerability within the patriarchal order. Yet the logic of Radcliffe's argument is that the plight of the prostitute differs from that of women in general only by degree. Given men's willingness to destroy the sources of female economic independence

and their corresponding reluctance to honour their duty to protect women, all women are potentially vulnerable. Radcliffe is critical of anti-prostitute prejudice and notes that popular opinion considers women to be 'by far the most ready in censuring their own sex' **[77]**. Radcliffe attributes this to the way in which society's moral codes are more stringently applied to women. Radcliffe recognises that the need to preserve the appearance of moral purity frustrates female solidarity and thus renders women complicit in their own oppression. Certainly her condemnation of those who 'defame the characters of oppressed females' finds an echo in Milne's criticism of those middle-class women who lead the criticism of working-class women (see Volume IV).

The Female Advocate constitutes an appropriate starting point for this anthology insofar as it anticipates many of the key debates of the coming century. In her discussion of female employment, Radcliffe draws attention to the inter-relationship between economic transformation and changing gender roles. Ironically, her complaint at male usurpation of properly female occupations will be reversed within three decades. Similarly, Radcliffe's call for the restoration of 'natural' or 'traditional' gender roles anticipates much of the protest of the next half-century. Indeed by articulating the linkages between class and gender in the Industrial Revolution, Radcliffe anticipates much recent historiography which has drawn attention to the ways in which working-class protests against industrialisation can also be read as protests against the transformation of gender roles and, in many cases, the erosion of working-class patriarchal power.

Radcliffe's decision to focus on prostitution also deserves notice. As Helsinger *et al.* note, public discussion of this 'social evil' was rare prior to 1850 (Helsinger *et al.* 1983: Vol. 2, 151). Furthermore, in her 'magdalenist' approach to prostitution Radcliffe betokens what Michael Mason, in *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes*, describes as 'the one completely distinctive feature of nineteenth-century sexual culture' (1995: 113). In addition, Radcliffe's use of the prostitute as a paradigmatic figure anticipates the importance attached to the same figure in the 1870s and 1880s, where she again symbolises the contradictions between the 'ideological' and 'actual' role allocated to women (Helsinger *et al.* 1983: Vol. 2, 151). Finally, *The Female Advocate* is significant in terms of its textual and rhetorical strategies. The problems faced by Radcliffe, most noticeably those of finding space within existing discourses on the nature and position of women, of finding ways to legitimise both her criticisms

and her solutions, and of finding an appropriate 'tone' in which to express herself, remained constant problems for women throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

JOANNA SOUTHCOTT

The inclusion of some short extracts from two of Joanna Southcott's pamphlets, *A Dispute Between The Woman and The Powers of Darkness* (1802), and *Sound an Alarm in My Holy Mountain* (1804), might seem rather curious. After all, neither Southcott herself nor those who emerged as Southcottian leaders (with two major exceptions) after her death in 1814 were renowned for their radicalism (Taylor 1983: 163–6). However, such an assessment fails to recognise the political ramifications of millenarianism which cannot be read simply as a function of the pronouncements of its individual leaders. J.F.C. Harrison argues, in 'a society dominated by an aristocratic and Anglican establishment . . . millenarians were liable to find themselves regarded as radicals, simply because they were dissident' (1979: 223). Furthermore, Harrison suggests that radicalism and millenarianism 'were not alternatives so much as different aspects of the same phenomenon' and that in the first half of the nineteenth century in particular, 'millenarian ideas and vocabulary' pervade radical movements (*ibid.*: 79, 129).

The two Southcottian leaders who provided a link between Southcottianism and Owenism were John ('Zion') Ward and James Elishama ('Shepherd') Smith. Smith is particularly important because he edited the Owenite journal, *The Crisis*, from 1833 to 1834. After leaving *The Crisis* he founded *The Shepherd* (1834–38) in which he promulgated the 'Doctrine of the Woman' (described by Taylor as a combination of Southcottianism, Owenite feminism and Saint-Simonianism), prophesying the advent of the female messiah who would usher in a new era of human history (Taylor 1983: 167–8). In addition to the 'Doctrine of the Woman', Smith expounded a philosophy which he called 'Universalism'. Described by Harrison as 'a combination of religious millennialism and social radicalism', Universalism was organised around three key ideas: polarity, analogy, and spiritual millennium (Harrison 1979: 142–57). Aspects of both the 'Doctrine of the Woman' and Universalism can be found in Frances Wright's *England, The Civilizer*, which is reprinted in Volume II of this anthology.

If early nineteenth-century radicalism often drew on millenarianism then Southcott's *A Dispute Between The Woman and The Powers of Darkness* provides an example of millenarianism employing radical themes and vocabulary. For example, Southcott accuses Satan of behaving as 'a tyrant' and of abusing his 'arbitrary power' **[101]**. In similar fashion, Satan, confident of victory, proposes a democratic election to decide who should govern the world.

> Now, let the world judge of the truth of my words, and see if the major part is not my friends; and, as most votes carry the day, I am very ready to be choosed by votes . . . If I cannot get most votes, I will willingly lose my election, and be no Member of Parliament at all. **[107]**

Southcott retorts that far from being elected, Satan will suffer a similar fate to that which befell the French King in the French Revolution. 'Thy friends will deceive thee: they will forsake thee: and be like the king of France's subjects – cut off thy head, and say, behold the head of a traitor' **[108]**. The Devil suggests bribing the electorate, 'I have millions of money . . . I will give leave for every pleasure they can wish' **[110]**. The resort to corruption, Southcott argues, simply seals his ultimate defeat.

> Men would sooner bring in a war to fight for God, and destroy those that gave in their names for thee, sooner than let thee gain such an election . . . thou hast lost thy election, by thy last speech, of gaining one vote. **[110–11]**

There is a sense in which the confrontation with the Devil recorded in *A Dispute Between The Woman and The Powers of Darkness* provides an allegory of the difficulties faced by lower-class women who wanted to be heard publicly. Southcott is confronted by an unknown, hostile and terrifying power determined to destroy her. She endures misogynistic insults; Satan curses her as an 'eternal bitch' and complains that he is unable to speak because her 'tongue runs on so fast' **[99]**. At one point Satan is so exasperated that he threatens Joanna with physical violence, 'I will dash thy head against the ceiling' **[100]**. In this respect Satan sounds less like the Prince of Darkness and more like the men complained of by the female writers to *The Pioneer*, *New Moral World* and *The Northern Star*, collected later in this volume. Similarly, Southcott concentrates on exposing the internal contradictions of Satan's arguments,

thereby creating a site able to sustain an oppositional rearticulation of the dominant discourse. This is a strategy of maximising discursive 'faultlines' in order to increase autonomy which has frequently been deployed by the less powerful.

If Southcott's text does indeed provide an allegory, then it is worth noting that it concludes with woman triumphant. As Southcott informs her adversary, 'if Satan down-argued the woman at first, she ought to down-argue him at last' **[104]**. Southcott's confidence in this dispute owes much to her own 'Doctrine of the Woman' which is described by Harrison as 'a kind of theological feminism' (1979: 108). Southcott's writings in this area emphasise the role that woman will play in the final defeat of Satan, thereby neutralising the misogynistic force of the story of the Fall. Southcott reinterprets the Fall in *Sound An Alarm in My Holy Mountain*, arguing that men have misunderstood and misjudged women's role.[2] Indeed God, speaking through Southcott, comments that men 'have sought out many inventions to wrest the Scriptures to their own condemnation' **[117]**. In Southcott's revision the Devil destroys woman in order to convince man of God's fallibility by showing that 'the woman [God] made for man's good was for his hurt' **[116]**. This diabolical interpretation of events has largely been accepted by man because God has 'concealed from the knowledge of man to this day, how [woman] could be for man's good' **[116]**. However, whilst man mistakenly blames woman, woman correctly blames the serpent. Thus God explains, 'I laid a plan in the creation to make room for man's redemption by the woman, that I created for man's good, by casting her blame on Satan's head' **[116]**. God continues by lambasting male intellectual presumption, observing that had he made his prophecies concerning women 'plain and true to men, they would not want, nor receive the woman for their good; but judge they knew all themselves' **[117]**. Masculine reluctance, born of an overweening intellectual arrogance, to recognise feminine knowledge will provide a permanent theme in the struggle for female emancipation throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

THE QUEEN CAROLINE AFFAIR

The next two selections take us from the writings of a Devonian domestic servant to writings about a wronged Queen, in the form of two pamphlets taken from the Queen Caroline affair, *The King's*

Treatment of The Queen shortly stated to the People of England (published by William Hone in 1820) and *Fair Play, or, Who are the Adulterers, Slanderers and Demoralizers?* by 'Shandy Sinecure' (published by William Benbow in 1820).[3] Both pamphlets support Caroline of Brunswick, the wife whom George IV wished to divorce and depose. They also provide examples of the way in which 'woman' could be made to figure in radical campaigns as well as the opportunities and dangers which attended radicalism's attempts to utilise ideological constructions of gender.

The King's Treatment of The Queen is an exercise in radical reappropriation. In particular, this pamphlet reworks Edmund Burke's famous remark on Marie Antoinette – 'I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult' (Burke 1986: 170) – casting Queen Caroline as the wronged princess and the Regent's Court and Ministers as the villains of the piece. In itself, this turning of the words of the great conservative loyalist against the British monarch must have given many radicals a degree of satisfaction. However, the pamphlet does not simply adapt Burke's memorable line to furnish itself with a closing sentence, it also attempts to use dominant 'conservative' attitudes (concerning the duty of men to protect women) to generate hostility towards the Court and Government. This is similar to the strategy which will later be adopted by Chartism in its struggle against the New Poor Law (documented later in this volume). There, too, the motifs of outraged womanhood and violated family relations will play a prominent role.

It is also a strategy which, as Iain McCalman observes, makes great use of the popular genres of gothic melodrama and domestic romance (1993: 176). Caroline is represented as a doubly wronged woman; neglected by her husband and unjustly separated from her daughter, she is both outraged wife and suffering mother. Her virtue is in stark contrast to the vice and malice of the Court. This fairy-tale structure supports a politics that is simultaneously emotive and simplistic. McCalman comments that both melodrama and romance are 'characterised by a powerful Manichean moral structure well-suited to conveying intense anti-establishment feelings' (*ibid.*). Once more it is interesting to note a similar 'structure of feeling' later in the century within Chartism. However, as McCalman points out, this strategy releases emotions that are both 'dangerously volatile or double-edged', capable of being turned against as well as being used by radicalism (*ibid.*: 177). In similar fashion, Jutta Schwarzkopf in *Women in the Chartist Movement*, argues that

Chartism ultimately became trapped within the domestic ideology it sought to appropriate for radical ends (Schwarzkopf 1991: 122).

The King's Treatment of The Queen ends by claiming that the 'cause of her Majesty is the cause of every woman in England', and calls on women 'to exert all their influence' in this case **[146]**. It predicts a degrading future for women if the persecution of the Queen succeeds, arguing that licence will have been given 'to every ruffian in the land to abuse and insult the wife, that he promised to cherish and protect' **[146]**. These anxieties concerning the perceived brutalisation of gender relations and increasing fragility of the family will remain a permanent aspect of radicalism for the next three decades.

Fair Play, or, Who Are the Adulterers, Slanderers and Demoralizers adopts a far more aggressive tone than the preceding pamphlet. Opening with a series of sharp questions which it claims the public is asking, it continues by condemning 'the filthy testimony of the filthy witnesses, arranged by a filthy junta' to discredit the Queen **[151]**. It then proceeds to give details of the adulterous activities of prominent government ministers, peers and clerics accompanied by details of the pensions and sinecures that they receive from the public purse. Sexual and financial improprieties are thereby linked in the public mind to create an image of a ruling class that is simultaneously immoral and corrupt, and therefore in need of reform. The Queen herself is little more than a cipher here, her treatment providing the pretext to launch a general attack on 'Old Corruption'.

According to McCalman, the misfortunes of Caroline of Brunswick provided ultra-radicalism with a much needed 'boost' which helped to carry the movement through the difficult 1820s (1993: 177). It may also have had a much longer-term impact on the development of English radicalism. Nearly twenty years after the Queen Caroline agitation had ended Mary Grassby makes reference to it in a letter to *The Northern Star* (17 March 1838) which is also reprinted in this volume.

THE PIONEER

The Pioneer, edited by James Morrison, served as the organ of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. Although it was a short-lived publication (running from September 1833 to July 1834), *The Pioneer* is important for a number of reasons. First, it 'was the second most widely-read working-class newspaper of the period,

(closely following *The Poor Man's Guardian*)' with a circulation of 20,000–30,000 copies and a readership probably ten times as large as its circulation (Taylor 1983: 97). Second, it gave both space and serious consideration to women's issues to the extent of publishing, from its twenty-seventh number onwards, a regular 'Woman's Page' (originally 'A Page for the Ladies'). From its inception the 'Woman's Page' called for the formation of an autonomous female public sphere in which women could discuss 'their own affairs . . . their own rights and privileges' (8 March 1834). *The Pioneer* gave practical support and encouragement by printing contributions from a number of women, including 'Bondswoman', the pseudonym of Frances Morrison, wife to James, whose future career as an Owenite lecturer is recorded in Volume III. The extent of Frances' involvement with the 'Woman's Page' is unknown, although Ruth and Eddie Frow, citing changes to its tone and focus, have suggested that '. . . it is possible that Frances undertook to produce the page on her own account' (Frow and Frow 1989: 136). Finally, *The Pioneer*'s lifespan coincided with the London tailors' strike. This strike possessed a bitter gender dimension, the complexities of which are debated in the paper's columns.[4]

Some of the women's pages have already been anthologised in Ruth and Edmund Frow's excellent study *Political Women 1800–1850*. This volume reprints every single 'Woman's Page' as well as a number of other contributions. *The Pioneer* deserves to be more widely known for two reasons. It constitutes a quasi-utopian moment in the history of the British working-class movement insofar as it refuses to privilege the claims of class over gender (or vice versa) and attempts instead to synthesise the legitimate claims of both. In addition, by inviting and publishing contributions from its women readers *The Pioneer* allowed, in the words of Barbara Taylor, 'a sudden, brief rush of words into the silence which surrounded the lives and consciousness of working-class women' (Taylor 1983: 96).

The unprecedented nature of this attempt to address women's concerns is suggested by the uncertainty regarding tone and mode of address which is such a striking feature of *The Pioneer*. The front-page letter 'To The Ladies In Union At Leicester' (26 October 1833), in which Morrison praises the formation of female unions in Leicester and invites them to write to *The Pioneer*, sees him uncertain as to how to address his intended readers. Following a comment that any man who tried to interrupt their proceedings 'would *literally* be brought up to the *scratch*', Morrison half-reproves himself for his 'badinage' and offers some practical suggestions as

to their organisation. Similarly, when he invites his 'fair sisters of Leicester' to write he expects 'tender epistles . . . [because there] is poetry in a woman's pen'. Although this tone is intended to encourage, to make the prospect of writing for publication less intimidating for working-class women, it also forces them to adopt an appropriate 'feminine' style. Morrison wants women to write in their own 'idiom' because he believes there is a fundamental experiential difference between men and women:

> . . . our thoughts are not your thoughts, nor our ways your ways. – A man cannot feign a woman's feelings . . . – He is the tyrant, – she the slave. – How can *he* pourtray *her* smothered thought, or write *her* anxious wish? Write yourselves, then, write yourselves. (*ibid.*)

This recognition of a valid female perspective that needs to be heard within the movement is somewhat undercut by Morrison's attempt to imagine the correspondence as a form of heterosexual romance.

> The Pioneer is far away; he cannot see your modest blush, nor know your doubting mind and nervous fear . . . Hail, then, the first 'brave wench' who sends the Pioneer a valentine. Hail! Pretty *Pioneera*! (*ibid.*)

Once more this lapse into jocularity is followed immediately by self-reproof, 'Alas, we are becoming pathetic; we must sober down a little' (*ibid.*).

If Morrison's tone was uncertain, the response to his overtures seems to have been equally hesitant. *The Pioneer* does not print a response until four issues later in the form of two poems from 'Pioneera' and 'A Leicester Lady' (23 November 1833). Pioneera's response is particularly interesting because of the suspicious way in which it reacts to Morrison's romantic rhetoric. The Pioneera's opening lines make clear that she fears 'seduction':

> Ah, Pioneer! I've often thought, and trembled
> At that same thought, that you were not sincere;
> I felt afraid, love, that your heart dissembled,

In the rest of the poem she returns to this theme of possible betrayal, 'Art thou in earnest, gallant Pioneer?' she asks and warns, 'If false, you heartless rogue, we curse your knavery'. Pioneera would

like to believe in *The Pioneer*'s sincerity but she wants further evidence – 'One faithful token from your skilful pen/That you are woman's friend'. Her poem concludes with a statement of her own ambivalence – 'we know not truly, loving scribe,/If 'tis thine aim to comfort or to gibe.' The second poem, from 'A Leicester Lady', also responds to the romantic undertones of Morrison's letter. However, her response is characterised by flirtatiousness rather than suspicion. She declares that if he is as good as his word then 'the choice of your love's the happiest wife/That now wears of Hymen the fetters', and that she herself hopes for 'A spouse like the brave PIONEER!'. In the very next issue *The Pioneer* seeks to reassure Pioneera of his sincerity, 'I am no mocker of a woman's wo[e]'.

However, despite these reassurances *The Pioneer* publishes no correspondence from women for another seven issues. In its nineteenth number (11 January 1834) it publishes a letter from 'A Mechanic's Wife in London'. Again this elicits no immediate response. Then in early February it publishes a letter from 'A Bondswoman' (8 February 1834) which prompts a response from the 'London Mechanic's Wife' (22 February 1834). Two weeks later *The Pioneer* publishes its first 'Page for the Ladies' and thereafter a steady flow of female correspondents – 'Vesta', 'An Initiated Weaver's Wife', 'A Woman', 'An English Woman', 'P.A.S.' and 'Gertrude' – contribute to its pages. However, despite welcoming female contributors, *The Pioneer* remained anxious regarding the tone of their contributions. Somewhat ironically, the first renamed 'Woman's Page' is preceded by a note to correspondents – 'A Woman *is rather too severe this week*' (26 April 1834). A couple of months later another regular correspondent 'P.A.S.' is the object of a patronising rebuke:

> We are sorry to refuse the insertion of the letter of P.A.S. to Mr Chaplin; but it is certainly too personal; . . . If she will wipe the gall off her pen with the end of her apron, we shall be happy to spare a corner for her in our next.
>
> (14 June 1834)

Thereafter P.A.S.'s appearances are confined to the 'To Correspondents' column. Two weeks later *The Pioneer* asks 'Does [P.A.S.] wish [her letter] published?' (28 June 1834). The following week saw:

> If the keen eye of P.A.S. could take a long glance into our study, she would soon see that we are not the sort of fellows to be soon angry with a woman. Why does she not calm

> down that warm but kindly spirit, and write as usual? If we thought it would be productive of good to publish her letter to Mr Chaplin, we should cheerfully comply with her request; but hard words upon private individuals are certainly objectionable. (5 July 1834)

This 'meta-correspondence' with 'P.A.S.' demonstrates the extent to which even sympathetic male radicals sought to regulate female expression. 'P.A.S.' is too personal, too shrill perhaps, and is put firmly in her (domestic) place by the jibe about wiping 'the gall off her pen with the end of her apron'.

The treatment of 'P.A.S.' contrasts strikingly with Morrison's support for greater female participation in political and social affairs. From the outset, *The Pioneer* advocated greater female autonomy – 'To The Ladies In Union At Leicester', for example, encourages women to replace male with female officials as quickly as possible. Similarly, the first 'Page for the Ladies', which links the seclusion and subordination of women, advocates women-only meetings and organisations 'until [woman] has obtained sufficient skill and experience to act in public' (8 March 1834). In a later 'Page' he defends the idea of female associations from charges that such organisations will only turn women into 'gossips, gadders, busy bodies, spouters' (29 March 1834).

This defence of female association arises in the context of *The Pioneer*'s trenchant criticism of those males opposed to female participation in public affairs. The keynote of this debate is struck in a letter from 'An Initiated Weaver's Wife' who points out the contradiction of male unionists opposing female unions (15 March 1834). The next edition of *The Pioneer* accuses men of 'Toryism' when it comes to the question of women's rights, and argues that men seek to preserve their own tyranny over women by the same means as masters seek to preserve their tyranny over men. *The Pioneer* objects to the arbitrary injustice which results from making a woman's remuneration for her domestic labour dependent on the good will, or otherwise, of her partner. It also advocates female association as a way of rendering the discharge of domestic labour less onerous and more efficient (22 March 1834). The following week 'A Page for the Ladies' castigates a male opponent of female union for having 'too much of the spirit of the MASTER in him'. Again, *The Pioneer* argues that working-class men who oppose female association use the same arguments to defend their privileges as are used by the aristocratic opponents of male unionism:

> But it is degrading to human nature to admit the superiority of one being over another, merely because the *gender* is different. What is this but aristocracy?
>
> (29 March 1834)

Furthermore, not only do they resort to the arguments of their political opponents, but they also replicate their practice, seeking to prevent union by keeping women isolated:

> Women must not be individualized. We warn all our sisters against every attempt in the male to scatter them, and prevent their communion. (29 March 1834)

This debate is given sharper focus by the London tailors' strike in which female labour played a number of significant roles. 'A Woman' asks if the tailors' union intends to drive 'industrious women out of employment' as waistcoat makers? (29 March 1834). The following week *The Pioneer* criticises the tailors' union for effectively declaring war on the female tailors and points out that the best way to resist the downward pressure on wages exerted by female labour would be to equalise rates of pay irrespective of gender: 'To make the two sexes equal, and to reward them equally would settle the matter amicably; but any attempt to settle it otherwise will prove an act of gross tyranny' (5 April 1834). The next edition of *The Pioneer* sees two letters from women extremely critical of the tailors' union and of male attitudes in general. 'A Woman' writes again accusing men of oppressing rather than protecting women, whilst 'An English Woman' draws attention to the way in which violence is used to enforce male dominance in the home. This letter is followed by one from 'P.A.S.' calling on women bonnet makers to unionise and stop undercutting each other (12 April 1834).

It is interesting to note that in subsequent weeks (and coinciding with its change of title) the 'Woman's Page' editorial generally becomes less controversial. The very first to appear under the revised heading discusses the derivation of the term 'lady' and asserts the importance of woman as a moral influence (26 April 1834). Following weeks see articles discussing the impact on mothers of a child's death, criticising young women for brazen displays of affection at Greenwich Fair, and discussing the agency which women already possess. One of the latter articles explicitly calls for reconciliation between the genders:

> We must do away with this railing of the sexes against each other; for, to tell the plain truth, there are faults on both sides. We must conciliate each other, and endeavour to facilitate the improvement of both . . . (3 May 1834)

It is tempting to read these articles as an attempt to establish areas of common ground following the divisiveness of the debate surrounding the tailors' strike, especially as this period coincides with the attempts to regulate the tone adopted by certain female correspondents noted earlier.

However, the 'Woman's Page' published in the thirty-seventh number of *The Pioneer* (17 May 1834) complicates such a reading. Its editorial opens with a stark prognosis – 'There is a strife to come between man and woman, the one has rights to claim, the other concessions to make'. It continues by offering a pessimistic account of the likely course of gender relations. In particular, it argues that relations between individual men and women are qualitatively different from gender relations collectively. One consequence of this is that *The Pioneer* (rather unusually for an Owenite publication) does not believe that love which manifests itself at an individual level can be translated to wider social relations: thus harmonious private relations alone are insufficient for the social regeneration of society. The inevitable consequence of this is sporadic gender conflict.

> The individual is very different from the sex collectively. The individual is a lover, the sexes collectively are not lovers; they are merely political parties, who eye one another with jealousy, and whenever an opportunity is afforded of a fair encounter, they will separate from each other like master and slave, the one to insist upon her rights to equality, the other to insist upon her obligation to obey. (*ibid.*)

This editorial also offers a bleak assessment of the current nature of gender relations. It likens marriage to a commercial transaction with women 'sent to market like a calf, and appropriated by the highest bidder' and argues that their ability to excite sexual desire is their surest defence in this morally degraded world.

> At present woman's chief support is sensual love. Were man not powerfully actuated by this passion, woman would be almost treated as an outcast from society. (*ibid.*)

The Pioneer, echoing Radcliffe, concludes by arguing that if women are denied the opportunity to earn a living by following legitimate occupations then they will be forced into prostitution.

> . . . if the women be prohibited from producing wealth, they will speedily become outlaws, and raise a sexual war. If women be prevented from making clothes, binding shoes, spinning, weaving, &c., what shall they do? They must haunt the street and prowl for prey, and then be reprobated by pious magistrates and other godly censurers of public morals, who devour their own children in punishing the crimes which they themselves create. (*ibid.*)

This analysis of a gender war in which patriarchal forces seek to reduce woman to her sexuality alone and then punish her for illegitimate uses of the same is, perhaps, the bleakest assessment of women's position to be published in the first half of the nineteenth century.

'KATE' AND *THE NEW MORAL WORLD*

The year 1834 witnessed the collapse of the Owenite Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in the wake of the defeat of the London tailors' strike. Owen, who had always been 'fearful of independent working-class action', sought to reorganise the movement as an 'authoritarian cult' under his immediate control and to instil a 'class-collaborationist' approach in his adherents. In both of these aims he was resisted by many working-class socialists and it becomes necessary to distinguish local Owenite practice from Owen's own pronouncements (Taylor 1983: 120/1). Some of the changes of emphasis and political direction attempted by Owen can be discerned by comparing *The New Moral World* (the official journal of the Owenite movement, which began publication in December 1834) with *The Pioneer*, which ceased publication in July 1834. In order to focus this comparison, this volume has reprinted the contributions of 'Kate' (Catherine Barmby) to *The New Moral World* from March 1835 to April 1840. This period covers the resurgence of Owenism and the emergence of Chartism as the major vehicle of working-class radicalism.

One of the most striking differences between 'Kate' and *The Pioneer* is that of tone. 'Kate' adopts a tone of almost Olympian detachment borne of a confident belief in the intellectual superiority of Owenism. She writes 'more in sorrow, than in anger' almost mourning the inability of Owenism's opponents to see the 'Truth'. These characteristics appear in 'The Principles of the New Moral World' where 'Kate' responds to the attacks of anti-socialist writers and lecturers.

> A grave charge has been brought against these [i.e. Owenite] principles . . . It is stated broadly and openly that these principles are in their tendency highly immoral; and therefore, to be extirpated from among society, as a poison-root.
>
> The subject, I admit, is to me, a very serious one . . . In my strongest aspirations after moral excellence, and they have not been few, to these principles have they been directed, as to the purest altar at which they could be offered. Truth, sincerity, the delicate refinements of sympathy and affection, were regarded by me as their beautiful emanations. Then how nearly impossible it is to conceive that thoughts so coarse, and language so virulent, should be employed against them? I confess it both shocks and startles me.
>
> But does it convince me that my judgement is wrong, or my opinions ill-founded? . . . Far from it . . . Oh! how earnestly do I wish that those of station and renown, who now condemn them, could be tempted to lay aside that spirit of conflict and antagonism, which is the real enemy of free and fair discussion, and calmly enquire into the nature of those principles. How do they lack in that high moral courage which would enable its possessor to follow truth wherever it may lead. (29 February 1840)

There is little sense of an embattled consciousness here compared to some of the contributors to *The Pioneer*.

However, there is a sense in which this self-confidence is, in part, also a function of a distance from direct political involvement. For another noticeable feature of 'Kate's articles is their lack of topicality; it would be difficult to date her writings on the basis of internal evidence because there are so few references to contemporary events. Once more the contrast with *The Pioneer* is striking.

Instead of analysing specific current events, 'Kate' concerns herself with three broad themes: manners, the exposition of Owenite ideas and the condition of woman.

'The Improvement of the Manners' provides the subject for the first of her articles. In it 'Kate' argues that the cultivation of manners will increase human happiness by making people more attentive to the needs of others. She returns to this theme in articles such as 'Flattery and Politeness', 'Morality', 'On Forbearance' and 'The Moral Virtues'. At first sight this focus seems curious – 'Kate' herself in 'The Improvement of the Manners' acknowledges that to many it appears a 'trifling and unworthy' subject – but she insists repeatedly that attention to manners and politeness will improve the quality of interpersonal relations. In 'On Forbearance' she argues for the political and social importance of the former – 'Whatever new powers and operations may be brought into activity, much, very much of their utility and success must depend on the mode and manner in which forbearance is understood and practised' (28 September 1839). The improvement of manners can thus be seen as providing meaningful political activity. Irrespective of the fortunes of the wider movement, individual socialists could engage in activity that hastened the advent of the New Moral World. The importance of such quotidian practices in preserving morale and commitment should not be underestimated.

The explication of Owenite ideas and doctrines is another noticeable aspect of 'Kate's' writings for *The New Moral World*. This provides the basis of eight of the pieces reprinted here: 'For the New Moral World', 'The Religion of the Millennium', 'On Superstition', 'Conversation of Sophy and Emma', 'The Love of Knowledge', 'Education – A Dialogue', 'Commonsense and Human Love' and 'The Principles of the New Moral World'. These reflect Owen's views on the importance of education, the formation of character by circumstance rather than free will, and the positive assessment of human nature if rationally directed. These articles were published over a period of almost five years yet there is little sense of change or development, reflecting in part the intellectual ossification of Owenism. Again, the comparison with *The Pioneer* is instructive. Whereas Owenite concepts and principles are implicit in the analyses offered by *The Pioneer*, they are explicitly stated and repeated in *The New Moral World*, where they often substitute for a specific analysis.

The third important question to which 'Kate' returns is the condition of woman. It forms the subject of her fourth article, 'Female

Improvement', in which she argues against the idea that as well as 'differences of sex there are also differences of mind' (13 June 1835). Woman's apparent intellectual inferiority is, she argues, a consequence of social conditioning not innate ability. Her next article, 'An Appeal to Woman' (published over two numbers), returns to this theme and seeks to establish a cross-class alliance of women on the basis of their shared moral nature. This alliance will necessarily be led, argues 'Kate', by middle-class and aristocratic women who have already succeeded in becoming active in the public sphere. This version of a cross-class alliance headed by the propertied classes is a common theme of bourgeois radicalism in the nineteenth century and beyond. It is therefore interesting to note that 'Kate' becomes more class conscious in the later 1830s. The 'Conversation of Jane and Eliza' (29 December 1838) contains some sharp criticisms of aristocratic and professional men. 'Woman and the Laws' notes that many of the laws relating to the family 'have reference only to parties endowed with . . . wealth' (29 June 1939). For those without wealth 'Kate' comments that we see the law 'doing absolutely nothing; family interests in these cases are not understood' (*ibid.*). She also argues that whilst the tyranny of man over woman extends throughout society, the particular manifestations of this oppression are class specific.

In similar fashion 'Kate's' later articles contain a much sharper sense of gender antagonism. Where her earlier articles tended to emphasise the ways in which female emancipation will ultimately be beneficial to men, later articles such as 'Woman' (4 March 1837) concentrate on the disproportionate harm done to woman under the existing social arrangements. 'Man's Legislation' (25 March 1839) examines the contradiction between the ideological importance ascribed to women as moral agents and their actual position in society, whilst 'Woman and the Laws' denounces the platitudes with which men seek to justify women's situation, as 'pet phrases' and 'wild jargon' inspired by a 'dread of women's enlightenment' (29 June 1839). Both of these articles appeared on the front cover of *The New Moral World* reinforcing the importance accorded to the 'Woman Question' within Owenism.

These articles are followed by four letters all of which respond to 'Kate'. The first is from a correspondent who styles himself 'Kate's Brother' and who proposes a number of measures designed to increase female participation within Owenism. The next three letters all discuss the question of female education and suggest that some of Owenism's internal debates were fiercer than 'Kate's' even prose

might lead us to believe. The final selection from *The New Moral World*, 'Woman As She Is And As She Ought To Be' by W.W.P. (12 January 1839 and 26 January 1839) is included for its summary of mainstream Owenite opinion in relation to gender issues.

THE NATIONAL, *THE NORTHERN STAR* AND *THE UNION*

The National, edited by W.J. Linton, was intended to be a radical miscellany. It aimed to bring the 'grandest and profoundest thoughts of our master intellects' to the attention of the people. Its tenth number, which addresses the treatment and position of women, is reprinted in this volume. Its significance is that it indicates the intellectual resources from which a progressive gender politics could be constructed. The key figures for *The National* are Milton, who provided a defence of divorce, Shelley for his critique of marriage and, non-libertine, defence of free love, and Wollstonecraft who provided the only 'total' analysis of women's oppression then available. This particular edition of *The National* followed the established format, combining a mixture of extracts (of varying lengths) from a variety of authors, some original prose narratives which share a common theme of women who are in effect 'murdered' by orthodox morality, and a short original essay 'The Right Of Woman'. In this essay Linton argues that women should enjoy the same political and social rights as men. In addition, he condemns economically motivated marriages as a form of prostitution and argues in favour of liberalising the divorce laws. Finally, he calls for the extension of women's property rights and employment opportunities, arguing (as Radcliffe had argued some forty years earlier) that this will abolish one of the major causes of prostitution.

Thus by the late 1830s it is possible to identify within English radicalism an established rationalist, often free-thinking, 'feminist' current. This current was both sceptical regarding the institutions of marriage and the family yet generally anti-sensualist and decidedly anti-libertine. It existed as an influential yet minority position alongside another current, which drew more heavily on traditional communitarian practices, gave greater weight to biblical precedent and authority, and took a more 'traditional' view of the consequences of sexual difference. This current sought to defend marriage and the family (and the patriarchal authority invested in and through these

institutions) which it saw as threatened by both the New Poor Law and the consequences of industrialisation. It is represented in this volume by a series of extracts taken from *The Northern Star* (*NS*) during the period from 1838 to 1842.

The first extract 'Female Public Meeting' (*NS*, 17 February 1838) indicates the extent of popular hostility towards the New Poor Law. The mover of the resolution describes the New Poor Law, to resounding applause, as having 'been hatched and bred in the bottomless pit'. She condemns the forced separation of women from their children and invokes woman's maternal role to justify female involvement in the campaign against the New Poor Law.

> They might be asked why women should interfere in public matters. She would answer at once, it was a woman's duty to be there; for women had more to fear from this bill than men. (Cheers.) Could she, the mother, be taught to forget her sucking child? No. No mother could, therefore under the influence of the Word of God, she would oppose that law and she called upon her sisters now before her to follow her example. (Tremendous cheering.) (*NS*, *ibid.*)

The use of maternal rhetoric to legitimise female political action also appears in the meetings of female radical associations at Carlisle (*NS*, 1 September 1838), Doghouse (*NS*, 30 March 1839) and in the 'Address of the Female Political Union of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne to their Fellow-Countrywomen' (*NS*, 9 February 1839), suggesting that 'domestic ideology' was capable of sustaining a radical inflection.

However, the defence of the working-class family was not the only strategy of legitimisation deployed by Chartist women. It is frequently used in conjunction with an appeal to Christianity. In particular, the words of the Anglican marriage service – 'Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder' – are invoked to underscore the perceived anti-Christian nature of the New Poor Law. In addition, many of the addresses, memorials and resolutions use the fact of a female monarch to authorise their own activity. For example, 'A Real Democrat' writes, 'It is the right of every woman to have a vote in the legislation of her country, and doubly more so now that we have got a woman at the head of the government' (*NS*, 23 June 1838). The London Female Democratic Association manages simultaneously to invoke Victoria whilst advancing an impeccably democratic argument:

> To those who may be, or rather appear to be, surprised that females should be daring enough to interfere with politics; to them we simply say, that as it is a female that assumes to rule this nation in defiance of the universal rights of man and woman, we assert in accordance with the rights of all, and acknowledging the sovereignty of the people our right, as free women (or women determined to be free) to rule ourselves. (*NS*, 11 May 1839)

A striking feature of the late 1830s is the presumption that women had a right to be politically active. 'A Real Democrat' provides a forcible example of this and she is not alone in her views. Thomas Clutton Salt also sought to mobilise the women of Birmingham on behalf of the Charter insisting that it was their duty to 'meddle with politics' (*NS*, 25 August 1838). The columns of *The Northern Star* testify to a widespread belief that women should use the tactic of 'exclusive dealing' as a way of bringing pressure to bear on enfranchised shopkeepers. The Nottingham Female Political Union suggested that

> . . . the shopocracy be left to their fate, and that no persons are so well qualified to bring these very important personages to their senses as the women of England upon whose minds we would impress as a public duty the necessity of expending their money only with the people or shopkeepers friendly to the cause of freedom, justice, Universal Suffrage, &c. (*NS*, 8 December 1838)

Indeed George Binns, addressing the patriot women of Sunderland, advocated 'carrying out a system of exclusive dealing, both in trading and in loving, with those only who were honest, upright Chartists' (*NS*, 8 June 1839).

The right of working-class women to participate in politics was far from universally accepted and women who were politically active could find themselves the object of scurrilous comment in hostile journals. This anthology reprints letters from two women, Mary Grassby and Elizabeth Hanson, who were key participants in the 'Female Public Meeting' referred to previously. Mary Grassby is responding to an article in the *Halifax Express* which suggests that her interest in reforming the New Poor Law owes more to self-interest than public spirit. It implies that Mr Grassby is a drunkard

who is unable to provide for his family and asks 'Are all the people to pay rates that, forsooth, Mr Grassby may lie at home at ease with Mrs Grassby and the little Grassbys [?]'. Mary Grassby refutes these imputations insisting that she and her husband 'have always paid rates' and accuses her antagonist of unmanly cowardice for hiding behind a 'dastardly "perhaps"'. Elizabeth Hanson also refers to the 'taunting language' used against her by the *Halifax Express* but refuses to be drawn further in this respect. Instead, she concentrates her fire on her opponent's arguments, demonstrating the foolishness of his original analogy and reappropriating and redirecting the abusive epithet of 'pauper'.

The correspondence with the *Halifax Express* serves as a reminder that politically active working-class women were more vulnerable to the charge of being 'unrespectable' at a time when notions of 'respectability' were becoming increasingly important components of both working-class masculinity and femininity (Taylor 1983: 204–5 and 262–3). It appears as if the presumption of women's political activity which seems so prevalent in 1838 dwindles quite rapidly thereafter. The London Female Democratic Association, for example, refers to 'that apathy and timidity which too generally prevails among our sex (arising from the prejudices of a false education)', which suggests a heightened awareness of the cultural obstacles preventing women's political involvement. Around this time Chartist women themselves appear to assume a more secondary or auxiliary role within the movement. It is noticeable, for example, that at both the 'Great Meeting of the Patriotic Women of Sunderland' (*NS*, 8 June 1839) and the 'Female Democratic Festival at Newcastle' (*NS*, 15 June 1839), women constitute the audience whilst men address the meeting. This is in stark contrast to those meetings noted earlier where both platform and audience were women. Jutta Schwarzkopf in her study *Women in the Chartist Movement* argues that women's contribution to the Chartist movement became defined in terms of 'lending male Chartists . . . moral support' (1991: 174). With the possible exception of exclusive dealing it is noticeable that there are fewer calls for direct action by women after 1838. Schwarzkopf also notes the decline in women's involvement in Chartism from 1839 to 1842 and this is reflected in the final three reprinted extracts from *The Northern Star* (*ibid.*: 199). Caroline Maria Williams' letter, with its practical suggestions for effective fund-raising, suggests the auxiliary role played by women (*NS*, 16 October 1841). Susanna Inge's letter 'To The Women of England' speaks of a waning female interest and involvement in Chartism whilst the final extract records the

attempt of male London Chartists to resurrect female support (*NS*, 30 July 1842 and 10 October 1842).

In part, this is symptomatic of the secondary role accorded to gender issues within Chartism. It is significant that the only 'theoretical' statement of any note produced by Chartism in this area is R.J. Richardson's *The Rights of Woman*, originally published in 1840 and reprinted (with an introduction by Edmund and Ruth Frow) by the Working-Class Movement Library in 1986. Described by Schwarzkopf as a 'conceptualisation of gender relations as these had evolved in the family economy of domestic industry' (1991: 75), Richardson's pamphlet received a favourable review in *The Northern Star* which is reprinted here (*NS*, 30 January 1841). Nine months after this review *The Northern Star* published an even longer and more favourable review of *The English Maiden* by H. Green Clark (*NS*, 16 October 1841). *The English Maiden* offers a traditional assessment of essential gender differences which identifies women with the domestic sphere. It argues that this inequality does not constitute female inferiority and suggests that the design of the sexes is clearly intended to facilitate harmonious relations. There are relatively few signs of Owenite influence apart from the letters from Charles Duncan and Susanna Inge (*NS*, 19 February 1842 and 2 July 1842).

There is a consensus among historians that the 1840s is a decade when working-class women 'disappear' from radical politics. Dorothy Thompson, in 'Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension', comments that, '. . . working-class women seem to have retreated into the home at some time around, or a little before, the middle of the century' (1993: 80). She argues that working-class women's political involvement, which was declining throughout the 1840s, accelerated after 1848. The reasons for this change are far less apparent than the change itself but Thompson suggests two possible explanations. The first involves the 'modernisation' and formalisation of working-class politics which excluded both unskilled working-class men and working-class women in general. However, as she herself observes, this provides only a partial explanation and she attributes far more significance to a change in working-class women's expectations and sense of their place in society as a version of middle-class domestic ideology became more securely established amongst the working class (1993: 97–100). Jutta Schwarzkopf revises this account in one important respect, arguing that the triumph of the domestic ideal was as much the product of an already existing, independent working-class

conception of 'proper womanhood' as the filtering down of the middle-class domestic ideal (1991: 280).

There are two other factors which are of possible relevance here. First, the Owenite challenge had been blunted as a result not only of attempts to re-stabilise working-class domesticity but also of the incorporation of Owenism within existing discourses of woman's special moral attributes. This meant that Owenism at times became a purveyor of mystified versions of domesticity and femininity rather than their trenchant critic. The extracts from *The Union*, edited by G.A. Fleming, provide an example of these processes.

Second, the publication of the *First Report of the Commission for Inquiry into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories* in 1842 had a profound effect on public opinion. Despite its title it also dealt with the employment of women and its reports of female employment in the mines, in particular, did indeed, in the words of *The Union*, 'startle society out of its most incomprehensible and criminal apathy' on this issue (1 May 1842). The harrowing effect of testimonies of women such as Betty Harris, a thirty-seven-year-old drawer in Little Bolton, Lancashire, remain undiminished even at a distance of more than a century and a half.

> I have a belt round my waist, and a chain passing between my legs, and I go on my hands and feet. The road is very steep, and we have to hold by a rope, and when there is no rope, by anything we can catch hold of. There are six women and about six boys and girls in the pit I work in; it is very hard work for a woman. The pit is very wet where I work, and the water comes over my clog-tops always, and I have seen it up to my thighs. I am not so strong as I was, and I cannot stand my work so well as I used to do. I have drawn till I have had the skin off me; *the belt and chain is worse when we are in the family way*. My feller (husband) has beaten me many a time for not being ready. I have known many a man beat his drawer. (*NS*, 28 May 1842)

Not only was such testimony shocking, it was, in the opinion of many, unanswerable. The conditions it described were indefensible. *The Union* article, 'Employment of Females in Mines', represents mines and miners as barbarous, the very antithesis of bourgeois civilisation. The mine obliterates distinctions of gender, 'it is difficult to distinguish the sexes employed in a mine, since both, when dressed, are clothed in rough miner's frocks and trousers'. The hint

at further horrors contained in that parenthetic 'when dressed' is confirmed in the next sentence which reveals that men working in the depths of the mine wear only 'a slight nether garment'. Women not only work in close proximity to those near-naked men they are also employed in situations where it is impossible to use pit ponies. The appalling physical conditions are matched by the moral climate in the mines, 'to hear the awful swearing, obscene conversation, and filthy songs, would lead any person to believe that he was in a land of savages'. Life beyond the mine is equally degraded. The employment of women and young girls in the mines prevents them from acquiring basic domestic skills. This in turn leads to an absence of domestic comfort which increases the attractiveness of the alehouse in the eyes of male miners (1 May 1842).

The solution to this problem according to *The Union* is to ban the employment of women in the mines. Parliament reached a similar conclusion and within a few months of the 1842 *Report* it had passed the 'Mines Act' (1842) which did indeed prohibit the employment of women underground. Two years later the 1844 Factory Act limited hours of employment for women and children, and Robert Gray, in *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830–1860*, notes that subsequent discussions of workplace conditions tended 'to emphasise particular risks to women' (1996: 95). In short, the image of the victimised, suffering, working-class woman proved incredibly effective in political and ideological terms. It had breached the *laissez-faire* arguments concerning adult labour, which had hitherto prevailed in parliament, and had secured (in theory at least) legislative protection for a section of the working class which might, in time, be extended to the class as a whole.

There are, therefore, a combination of factors and a number of possible motivations which prompt working-class men to emphasise the dependency and vulnerability of women. These range from a sincere wish to protect working-class women from the depredations of industrialisation, through tactical expediency, to a self-interested desire to bolster their own power at the expense of women. At the same time these 'economic' considerations are accompanied by a renewed interest in the domestic. Conservatives, Whigs and Radicals all believed that there was a very close relationship between familial and social stability. They all saw the family as a primary institution in social reproduction and differed only in their evaluation of its functions in this respect. Conservatives applauded the hierarchical and patriarchal values inculcated by the family whilst Radicals sought an alternative form of familial organisation which would

not reproduce these inequalities. Similarly, there were the cultural pressures generated by middle-class respectability, the keynotes of which included the 'sentimentalisation' of the home and an insistence on rigidly demarcated gender spheres. Given the force of these vectors it is hardly surprising that the working-class movement should evince such an interest in the domestic.

The valorisation of the domestic ideal provides evidence of bourgeois hegemony rather than middle-class ideological domination in the second half of the nineteenth century. This distinction – hegemony not domination – is important because we need to recognise the extent to which its sources lay within both radicalism and working-class culture more generally. The domestic ideal like those other badges of respectability, self-help, self-improvement and abstinence, were not just imposed from without but generated from *within* working-class culture. Indeed it is precisely their autonomous, prior existence within working-class culture that explains the widespread legitimacy enjoyed by such ideals. As regards middle-class domesticity Schwarzkopf, as noted earlier, argues that it was grafted on to a pre-existing working-class notion of proper womanhood (1991: 280). Similarly, Judy Lown in *Women and Industrialization: Gender at Work in Nineteenth-Century England* argues that (during the 1840s) working-class women were more resistant to middle-class domestic ideology than working-class men who used domesticity to consolidate their own authority over working-class women (1990: 161–3, 184–6). Lown identifies this as a crucial dynamic within Chartism, yet *The Union* demonstrates the ways in which Owenism might move from opposition to incorporation without appearing to renounce any of its doctrines concerning the position and treatment of women.

The first number of *The Union*, published in April 1842, contains an article entitled 'Woman, The Great Social Reformer'. This article argues that woman exerts a decisive influence on the social order for two reasons. First, it argues that, to use an anachronistic term, the genetic inheritance of a child 'is chiefly derived' from the mother. Second, it argues that domestic life precedes social life and, as a result, private opinion precedes public opinion. The result of this is that woman-as-mother exerts a tremendous influence on social affairs, *The Union* declares, 'Nations are but the reflex of Homes: Peoples of Mothers'. The article concludes by calling, not for the extension of female influence (which it argues would be impossible) but for this influence to be properly directed by giving her an appropriate education.

Two subsequent articles, 'Female Education I. Social' (1 November 1842) and 'Female Education II. Moral' (1 December 1842), indicate just what an 'appropriate' education entails. The first article emphasises the importance of training women in those skills essential to the acquisition of domestic comfort. It highlights four skills in particular, '1, Habits of Cleanliness. 2, Habits of Order. 3, Knowledge of Cooking. 4, Knowledge of Hygiene'. It argues that there is a close correlation between a person's physical and moral condition, 'the body that is dirty will have a mind that is dirty'. It also suggests that the domestic incapacity of working-class women is responsible for the breakdown of working-class domesticity: 'Many a poor man is now-a-days driven from his own hearth because it does not, unfortunately, afford the means of physical satisfaction and comfort'. In an attempt to raise the status of the domestic the article continually refers to the 'Science of Domestic Comfort' and even expresses the hope that 'some female Bentham may yet arise to complete . . . an encyclopedic code, that will supersede for ever the false guides and erring prophets of the old English kitchen'. Doubtless, the author would have recognised Delia Smith as the fulfilment of this prophecy!

The second article focuses on the moral education of women and its major concern is with the cultivation of 'affection' which it describes as 'the great business of a woman's life'. In particular, women need to be rescued from the clutches of 'fashionable novels and romances . . . [and] taught to love wisely'. The article also provides a checklist of those qualities which should be cultivated in women, namely: good temper, gentleness, cheerfulness, charity and a taste for the beautiful. It is instructive to compare *The Union*'s list of desired attributes (both social and moral) with those identified by Cobbett in his *Advice to Young Men* reprinted in Volume III of this anthology. There is little here that Cobbett would disagree with and it might even be suggested that he envisages a rather less sentimental education for women. Certainly, the combined effect of both the articles in *The Union* is to identify women completely with domesticity and feeling, thereby situating this trend within Owenism firmly within patriarchal gender ideologies.

The final article reprinted from *The Union*, 'The Women of the Working Classes', appeared in the tenth number in January 1843. It notes that the suffering of women generally, and of working-class women in particular, has excited little comment historically. It argues that the corrosive effects of poverty are borne disproportionately by working-class women and observes that this poverty is as much

a poverty of opportunity and aspiration as of material conditions. All too often, *The Union* suggests, the choice confronting working-class women is that of 'exchanging one kind of slavery for another'. However, following these opening paragraphs the focus of the article shifts and the condition of working-class women is replaced by an anxiety concerning the collapse of working-class domesticity. Once again the collapse of the working-class family is traced to the inability of women to provide a proper domestic environment as a result of their participation in the industrial workforce, 'the factory tears her from . . . [her domestic] duties: homes become no longer homes; children grow up uneducated and entirely neglected; the domestic affections are crushed or blunted'. Furthermore, *The Union* offers a striking image of factory women as a demoralised and undifferentiated mass, an example of the monstrous feminine.

> The atmosphere, moral and physical, in which they live, stimulates their animal appetites; the influence of bad example becomes contagious among them, and mischief thus becomes propagated far and wide. Imagine one thousand females, of all ages, congregated together, as in some mills that we know of, – without separation, classification, distinction, or character, – under no authority which they respect, and with little sense of accountableness; and then, how can we wonder at this resulting in great physical, moral, and mental deterioration? (1 January 1843)

The Union argues that the collapse of working-class domesticity is productive of wider social collapse whose symptoms include 'the morbid tone of feeling and opinion which prevails in almost all our manufacturing districts'. Indeed, it offers the extensive involvement of working-class women in the mass strikes of 1842 as evidence of a social order on the brink of collapse. In an analysis which resembles that offered by many conservative commentators *The Union* argues that the problem of class conflict can be resolved by 'returning' working-class women to the domestic sphere:

> . . . every facility should be given for the restoral of the women of the working-classes, to the home of the working-classes. So long as the women of the manufacturing towns, instead of devoting their time to the performance of their domestic duties, which is their proper function in civilized life, spend their time in the factory and workshop, so long

> is it to be expected that the population of the manufacturing towns will be uneducated, turbulent, and discontented . . .
> (1 January 1843)

If some trends within Owenism adopted a more conservative approach to gender politics, Owenism retained its radical edge in matters of religion. Free thought not only remained an important aspect of Owenism but in its mid-century incarnation as 'Secularism' it 'not only survived the decline of Owenism, but rapidly became a national movement in its own right, with a number of feminist leaders who saw themselves as direct ideological descendants of Emma Martin' (Taylor 1983: 282). This volume closes with three secularist pamphlets; two from Emma Martin, *A Funeral Sermon occasioned by the Death of Richard Carlile* (1843) and *God's Gifts and Man's Duties* (1843) and an undated pamphlet, *What Has The Bible Done For Women?* by Joseph Barker.

EMMA MARTIN AND SECULARISM

Emma Martin was born into a lower middle-class family in Bristol in 1812. At seventeen she became an energetic member of the Particular Baptists and in 1839 she began defending Christianity against the Owenites in public debates. Her Owenite opponents acknowledged her as a formidable combatant. However, towards the end of 1839 a combination of personal and spiritual crises saw her become a Socialist lecturer. In the early 1840s Martin's fame and notoriety were such that she was capable of attracting audiences of between 2,000 and 3,000 people to her lectures and debates, and frequent attempts were made by her opponents to disrupt or prevent her meetings. In the recriminations following the mid-1840s decline of Owenism, Martin found herself blamed by some for her confrontational and controversial approach. Angered by this she resigned as a lecturer and retrained as a midwife, a profession she practised until her early death, aged 39, in 1851.[5]

During her career as an Owenite lecturer Martin published a number of pamphlets including, *The Bible No Revelation*, *Religion Superseded, or The Moral Code of Nature Sufficient to the Guidance of Man* and *First Conversation on the Being of God*. As these titles suggest these were all works of theological or religious controversy.

The *Funeral Sermon* is included here, in part, because it provides a text where the radicalism of the 1840s acknowledges its debt to the radicalism of the 1820s, and in part, because it records, albeit briefly, the contribution of some of the remarkable women who joined Carlile in the battle for press freedom. It is also included because it gives a sense of Martin's fiery and uncompromising style. Not only does Martin excoriate the clergy as 'spiritual jackalls [sic]', she also condemns that 'timidity in the liberal world' which leads to compromise, backsliding and vacillation on matters of principle. The *Funeral Sermon* is accompanied by *God's Gifts and Man's Duties* for two main reasons. First, it gives some indication of the intellectual influence of Frances Wright insofar as both the substance and mode of Martin's argument in the pamphlet's opening four pages recall Wright's *Course of Popular Lectures*. The second reason is to chart the differences between these two accomplished public speakers. Martin is far more polemical than Wright; she proceeds by demolishing her opponent's case point by point, demonstrating the logical contradictions and paradoxes involved (as she sees it) in Christian belief. Her method is ruthless but it can also be sardonically humorous and daring. For example, she cites her opponent (the unfortunate Reverend Massie) as claiming, 'God gives opportunely, Man's extremity is God's opportunity', and retorts, 'I need not ask how often you have been in extremity without meeting God's opportunity'. In similar fashion, the Rev. Massie's contention that both King and peasant 'are fed of the field' elicits the following response,

> We almost thought that Kings required very different food from common mortals, since £700,000 a-year is awarded in this country for the support of the *bauble-royalty*. We might have thought Sovereigns lived on ambrosia, and that it was often necessary for men to send by a railway to Heaven for new supplies. **[578–9]**

This mocking humour redolent of post-Napoleonic ultra-radicalism serves an important political function because, as a number of critics have recognised, laughter liberated minds, undermined awe, reduced fear and thereby emboldened.[6] Martin's confrontational, uncompromising style was intended to excite, to give certainty and confidence to her sympathetic auditors – it is this impulse that informs her closing challenge:

> Mistake me not, then: it is not Christian differences with which I war, but the *system* itself; – not translations or commentaries, but the BOOK. Who will confront me?
> **[579]**

The final selection in Volume I is Joseph Barker's *What Has The Bible Done For Woman?*, which serves as a reminder of the strong links between secularism and feminism. Barker's pamphlet offers a comprehensive summary of the arguments (he lists thirty-three in total) used by, what might be called, 'infidel feminism' against the Bible and organised Christianity. Barker begins by rejecting the idea that the Bible has improved the position and treatment of women, arguing that any improvement in woman's condition has arisen in spite of rather than because of Christianity. His primary objection to the Bible is that it 'always treats woman as man's inferior' and this finds concrete expression in the manifold legal and social disabilities placed on women by Mosaic law **[587]**. Barker insists that many of these inequalities, particularly as regards property, employment and educational rights, persist in the present. Thus, argues Barker, the Bible tends 'to encourage injustice and cruelty towards woman' **[604]**. Furthermore, he claims that the clergy only 'pretend great respect' for women **[598]**. The praise they bestow on women resembles that given to slaves by slave-owners, comments Barker, and he suggests that their actual social position provides the real measure of the esteem in which women are held in Christian countries. The real proponents of women's rights, he claims, are the 'rationalists, or heretics and unbelievers' and those Christian sects, notably the Quakers and Unitarians, who 'are in reality infidels' **[599]**. Barker also argues that the Bible 'knows nothing about love in its highest forms' and as a result of this it cannot understand woman's fundamental need for 'perfect, infinite, reciprocal affection' which is the hallmark of the 'true marriage' **[600–1]**.

NOTES

1 *The Female Advocate* is reprinted in full apart from the omission of the moral tale – 'The Story of Fidelia' – with which Radcliffe concludes her work.

2 *Sound An Alarm In My Holy Mountain* was one of only two texts (the other was *A Caution and Instruction to the Sealed*) which all Southcottians were required to buy (Harrison 1979: 111).

3 Details of the Queen Caroline affair can be found in Prothero (1981) *Artisans and Politics* and McCalman (1993) *Radical Underworld*.
4 Details of the London tailors' strike can be found in Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem*.
5 Details of Emma Martin's biography are taken from Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem*.
6 For a discussion of the radical potential of laughter, see McCalman (1993), pp. 122–3.

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THE FEMALE ADVOCATE

OR

AN ATTEMPT TO RECOVER THE *RIGHTS OF WOMEN* FROM MALE USURPATION

BY MARY ANNE RADCLIFFE

The fairest of created works was made
To share, with man, th'empire of creation,
T' enjoy its comforts and its sweets, its pains
And suff'rings—

Anon.

London
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1799

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TO THE READER

So various and complicated are the scenes of this life, that seven years have elapsed since the following pages were written, a period, perhaps, more favourable for publishing than the present; but timidity, or other hinderances have repeatedly prevented their appearing before the public; during which time the author hoped some more able advocate would have taken up the cause, to do justice to a subject of such importance to society at large, and particularly a much injured part thereof. For, alas! it is too well known, that female education, in general, is confined within very narrow limits, and seldom permitted to extend to classical accomplishments. The writer of this volume being a female, with only a female's education, is sufficiently aware of her inadequacy to the undertaking, but trusts the importance of the subject will claim some attention; at the same time, reposing a full confidence in the candour and unbounded goodness of some part of her readers at least, she is once more encouraged to resume the pen, to add, or amend such remarks as the nature of the times and circumstances require, and, at length, has so far surmounted her timidity, as to submit the following sheets, with all their imperfections, to the inspection of a generous public, who are more ready to appreciate the works of individuals from the rectitude of intention, than the beauty of composition. The attempt, she must acknowledge, has cost her many a painful emotion; for a first attempt, surrounded by all the disadvantages peculiar to the sex, seems, to her, to require no small share of courage, and which, indeed, nothing but the importance of the subject should have induced her to encounter.

The subject of the following pages is an attempt to delineate the situation of those poor, helpless, females whose sufferings, from a variety of causes, are too grievous to be borne; the sources and dire consequences of which the exalted in life cannot form the least conception, unless they condescend to examine for themselves, when, it is to be hoped, their grievances will be sought into and redressed. The munificence of the people of Great Britain, which is ever ready

and adequate to the support, aid, and comfort, of the afflicted, when their troubles are fully investigated; and the great number of unfortunate women, who, doubtless, would rejoice to become virtuous and useful members of society, in some lawful employment, have encouraged the author to offer this feeble representation. Nor can she despair of eventual success to the cause she has engaged in, if she is but so happy as to excite the attention of those whose souls are enlarged with the exalted ideas of Christian charity.

Indeed, it is a work which, as a duty to our fellow creatures, she has long, very long, wished to see executed by a more able pen; but the silence of others, the liberality of a generous public, and a most ardent wish to see misery alleviated, and virtuous industry crowned with abundant success, have been the principal motives to her engaging in so arduous an undertaking. Conscious, however, that whatever good may be the result, the praise alone is due to the benevolent principles of humanity.

The author, at the same time, wishes it to be understood, that she has not been stimulated, from vain and ambitious views, to appear in print, but rather from the pure philanthropic motive of throwing in her humble mite towards the much-wished-for relief of these most pitiable objects of distress; numbers of whom, from the want of a fair representation of their case, she greatly fears, are unable to obtain shelter under the auspicious shade of Christian charity; and, consequently, are compelled to share the fate of the most wretched of human beings. She wishes to represent the case of those who would be industrious, if they might, but are held down by the most powerful influence of custom and misrepresentation; and, consequently, are incapable, without the kind assistance of humanity, to find redress, or even again to tread the paths of virtue. But, alas! finding herself so feeble an advocate, she can only hold the pen of Truth, whilst Reason and Justice plead their cause.

Kennington Cross,
March 6th, 1799.