

Nonconformist Women Writers, 1720–1840

Edited by
Timothy Whelan



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NONCONFORMIST WOMEN WRITERS,
1720–1840

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GENERAL EDITOR

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VOLUME 7

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Religious Prose of Jane Adams Houseman

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INTRODUCTION

Maria Grace Andrews and *The Noble Enthusiast* (1792)

Maria Grace Andrews published two works prior to her twentieth birthday. The first was *Cheyt Sing*, a poem on the troubled fate of an Indian prince, composed when she was fifteen and published anonymously in 1790, dedicated to the Whig MP Charles James Fox. The second was her sentimental novel, *The Noble Enthusiast; A Modern Romance*, published anonymously by William Lane's Minerva Press in June 1792. Lane's publishing house in Leadenhall Street became one of the chief purveyors of the circulating-library novel, which by the second decade of the nineteenth century had become a term of derision and contempt. As Thomas Love Peacock would later write, the novels issued by the Minerva Press were 'completely expurgated of all the higher qualities of mind'.¹ The fact that Maria Grace Andrews did not affix her name to the title page was not uncommon for women novelists at the Minerva Press. More than half of Lane's titles in the 1790s appeared anonymously, with the majority written by women. Dorothy Blakey reminds us that even though most of the authors of the Minerva Press are now 'almost completely forgotten', some of them 'were the best sellers of their day'.²

Were it not for the correspondence from the early 1790s between Maria Grace and her sister Anne that now resides in the Reeves Collection, Bodleian Library, and the Saffery/Whitaker Papers, Angus Library, *The Noble Enthusiast*, 'completely forgotten' today, would also have remained unidentified.³ The first reference to the novel in the correspondence in Volume 6 occurs in a letter by Anne to Maria Grace, at that time living with her grandparents in Salisbury, dated 18 March 1792.⁴ 'I have been waiting the success of M^r Andrews's repeated attempts', she writes, 'to recover the Money from M^r Lane due on the sale of the Noble Enthusiast which will form one of the principal ingredients of the long expected Parcel which I have so much wish'd to send that I could not reconcile myself to writing without it'.⁵ The usual amount Mr Andrews could recover from Lane for a first novel by a nameless author was between £5 and £20. Maria might have hoped for more, however, for in 1790 Lane attached a note to an

advertisement to *Adeline; or, The Orphan*, informing 'his Literary Friends and the Public, that his Repository is now open for Manuscripts of Merit against the next Season; and that a sum, from Five to One Hundred Guineas, is ready for such Favors as may be presented to his Press.' Maria received the parcel and on 7 May congratulated her sister that 'your labors are ended with the Enthusiast; he will owe much to your circumspection; may his good name repay you'. 'This child of Fancy has long given me the Title of Mother', she added, 'but I am here stampd a Matron in a more serious sort',⁶ suggesting the first hint in the letters that Maria was showing signs of a kind of postpartum rejection of her artistic creation, possibly from fatigue and loss of interest. More likely it was the result of her entrance into a radically new culture in Salisbury, centred upon the Baptist church in Brown Street and her new friends, the Baptist minister John Saffery and his wife, Elizabeth. Anne's next letter closed with a pithy postscript, 'Your Hero is in good health hope soon to get you a sight of and inform you of his exploits'.⁷

After Maria's departure from Isleworth at the close of 1791, she left the responsibility for preparing the final copy to her seventeen-year-old sister, including correcting the proof sheets of the novel and composing the preface. The proofs arrived and, as expected, were full of errors, which Anne corrected as best she could. She finished the preface, and on 16 May could boast to Maria,

I am happy to inform you that the error in the proof Sheets has been partly rectified, and I expect on Wednesday to see it completely so. – I send you with this the Preface, have written it as correctly as I could it now remains with you, to expunge what parts you should think proper, which I hope you will do as soon as possible as it will be the only probable hindrance to the publication of the Work.⁸

Maria reviewed the preface and returned it (whether she made any changes is unknown) to her sister on 22 May, opening her letter with another comment suggestive of her growing weariness with the novel:

I have finish'd the inclosed Task; and begin now to enjoy the sweet leisure of sentiment; and to address my Friend. – On Thursday I received your very grateful Letter, a nervous weariness, adding to an inward disaffection for the business it enjoin'd, and an intervening Sabbath, has delay'd mine till now.⁹

Anne was facing a publishing deadline by Lane, and her level of anxiety was increasing with each passing day that she did not hear from her sister. Maria's letter of Tuesday, 22 May, is without an address page, which generally meant that it was sent by a private messenger, not an uncommon occurrence with letters at this time. A delay must have ensued, for on Friday an anxious Anne notified her sister that the preface had not yet arrived and her deadline was now upon her. Fearful that 'one of the parcels might have miscarried', she reminded her sister

that last Tuesday or Wednesday sen'night I sent you a paquet containing a letter and the preface, by the Night Coach, which I hope you duly received to this letter I expected an Answer and the Preface return'd, in less than nine days, which are now elapsed, and the expectation yet unaccomplish'd, M^r Plomber demands one part of this wish'd for paquet, but with a far more interesting and incessant call does my anxious, palpitating heart require the other.

Mr Plomber was one of Lane's employees at the Minerva Press, and his presence suggests that he had already begun badgering Anne for the revised preface and proofs in order to maintain the printing schedule. 'The last sheets of your book now lie before me,' Anne adds, 'all blunders are I believe rectified but we intend to have a set of it down, before they are stitch'd, to examine, and see if any of the material alterations are neglected'.¹⁰ As might be expected, no sooner had Anne dashed off her letter than the expected parcel arrived, and she informed her sister that all was well on 29 May.

The novel appeared sometime in June, and references to it thereafter are relatively few. Not hearing any word on the status of her novel, Maria wrote to Anne on 28 June, chiding her in the postscript, 'You say nothing of my gentle hero'.¹¹ The next day a letter arrived from Anne, failing again to mention the novel, an indication she had yet to receive a copy from the publisher. Copies must have come shortly thereafter, however, and one was promptly sent to Salisbury. Maria's queries about her novel seem provoked more by anxiety than excitement, and her letters to Anne continue to reveal a diminished confidence in her creative abilities. On 14 July she writes, 'I have yet no congratulation on my former triumph'.¹² A week later, some congratulations finally arrived in Anne's next letter, though responses from her friends at Isleworth to her novel were not entirely glowing. 'Wynne speaks in very flattering tones of your Enthusiast', Anne writes, but 'M^{rs} Larkin's praise is less warm – Would advise you to see if some of those books cannot be sold to libraries of Booksellers in Salisbury', another indication that the ultimate resting place of *The Noble Enthusiast* would indeed be the circulating libraries. Anne attempted to improve her sister's growing despondency by praising her imaginative powers. 'You assure me my Sister,' she writes,

that you still maintain the distinguish'd eminence of Heroic Sentiment – that the spark is not quench'd that your young Eaglet Ambition is trying his fragile wings, and straining his tender eyes, to gaze on the Sun-enlighten'd goal to which you have directed his flight – I congratulate you on the prowess of this young Adventurer let me counsel you tho not to bound his Aim; let him be high privileged in an immortal one remember – 'He builds too low, who builds below the Skies' I am sorry to hear that the Mind that son of immortality is in you so 'fetter'd by his gross Companion's fall,' and thus, 'dependant on the dust' We will wish health, activity, and good will to this Minister, if it be only to enable the Sovereign to execute his wise and salutary purposes.¹³

Though Maria's anxiety over the reception of her novel may have been warranted (Anne's final postscript in the letter admonishes her sister to 'not let the errors you may find in your *Enthusiast* grieve you they are natural evils'), Anne sought to bolster her confidence by reminding her that Benjamin Charles Collins, who had recently inherited his father's bookshop in Salisbury as well as the proprietorship of the *Salisbury Journal*, had some royalties for Maria from sales of *Cheyt Sing*, the 1790 poem Collins had sold in conjunction with James Woodhouse of London.

In June 1793, as Anne Andrews prepared to visit her sister at Salisbury, she asked her 'what things in my possession would be suitable or agreeable to you & I will bring them with me', including 'the Manuscript of the Novel', which had remained behind when Maria left for Salisbury in December 1791.¹⁴ By this time, Maria's attentions were completely absorbed by her new nonconformist community; her novel had become a distant memory, an unwanted stepchild relegated to a closet in Isleworth, certainly not a cherished treasure of her creative imagination. The novel had been reviewed harshly the previous October. 'We cannot bestow much applause on this romance, which is by no means interesting', the critic for the *English Review* observed, dismissing the novel primarily for its 'inflated' language, citing the preface as a particular grievance, which may have been as far as the reviewer read.¹⁵ William Lane was not deterred by the poor review, advertising the novel (titled simply 'Modern Romance, 3 vols') along with some fifty other novels by the Minerva Press, in the London *Morning Chronicle* on 8 and 10 January 1793. *The Noble Enthusiast* was also advertised at the end of volume IV of Mary Pilkington's novel *Rosina* that year. Anne's advice that Maria should see if copies of *The Noble Enthusiast* could 'be sold to libraries of Booksellers in Salisbury' would prove prophetic. Minerva Press novels were staples of circulating libraries in England and America from the 1790s to the 1830s. *The Noble Enthusiast* seems to have disappeared rather quickly in England, but in America (where the only two known copies of the novel reside)¹⁶ it had a fairly long shelflife, appearing as entry 1367 in the 1853 catalogue of James Hammond's Circulating Library in Newport, Rhode Island.¹⁷

In Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* (1785), her three characters – Hortensius, Sophronia and Euphrasia – discuss one evening the characteristic of novels popular with the typical circulating library. Euphrasia contends that 'A Circulating Library is indeed a great evil, – young people are allowed to subscribe to them, and to read indiscriminately all they contain; and thus both food and poison are conveyed to the young mind together'. Hortensius agrees, suggesting that a 'person used to this kind of reading will be disgusted with every thing serious or solid, as a weakened and depraved stomach rejects plain and wholesome food'. He explains his point further:

The seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart, – the passions are awakened, – false expectations are raised. – A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues, – she expects to be addressed in the style of these books, with the language of flattery and adulation. – If a plain man addresses her in rational terms and pays her the greatest of compliments, – that of desiring to spend his life with her, – that is not sufficient, her vanity is disappointed, she expects to meet a Hero in Romance.

Euphrasia has the last word, contending that if parents teach their children properly, when they grow up ‘they will scorn to run over a circulating Library, but will naturally aspire to read the best books of all kinds.’¹⁸

Writing in 1810, Anna Laetitia Barbauld took a more realistic view of novel-reading, which to her provided ‘entertainment’, not moral or social instruction. In *An Essay on the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing*, Barbauld agrees with Reeves’s Euphrasia that making the right ‘choice’ in a novel is important, but thinks the greater danger may lie in the very nature of the sentimental plot itself, for even if

the looser compositions [those cited by Hortensius that sow ‘the seeds of vice and folly ... in the heart’] of this sort are excluded, and the sentimental ones chiefly perused, perhaps the danger lies more in fixing the standard of virtue and delicacy too high for real use, than in debasing it. Generosity is carried to such excess as would soon dissipate even a princely fortune; a weak compassion often allows vice to escape with impunity and overstrained delicacy, or regard to a rash vow, is allowed to mar all the prospects of a long life: dangers are despised, and self is annihilated, to a degree that prudence does not warrant, and virtue is far from requiring. The most generous man living, the most affectionate friend, the most dutiful child, would find his character fall far short of the perfections exhibited in a highly-wrought novel.

Love is overemphasized, she argues, and plots and endings too neatly constructed, ignoring the fact that real life is more ‘a kind of chance-medley, consisting of many unconnected scenes.’¹⁹ Given the convolutions, improbabilities and inconsistencies of plot in *The Noble Enthusiast*, Barbauld might have thought the novel closer to her idea of reality than some of the more finely constructed novels of the 1790s.

Whether the danger of novel-reading lay in ‘debasing’ morals or ‘fixing the standard ... too high’, Maria Andrews created characters in *The Noble Enthusiast* that represent both extremes – the duplicitous, corrupt lover in Cathcart, and the virtuous paragon of sentiment in Eustace Rosemont – the latter failing in precisely the terms Barbauld set forth. If the nineteen-year-old Andrews believed she was answering William Lane’s call for ‘Manuscripts of Merit against the next Season’ with the composition of *The Noble Enthusiast*, we might do well to read it today in the spirit of Barbauld, who admitted that even though ‘a great deal of trash is every season poured out upon the public from the English presses, yet in general our novels are not vicious; the food had neither flavour

nor nourishment, but at least it is not poisoned.' To Barbauld, English 'taste and habits are still turned towards domestic life and matrimonial happiness', and the worst harm derived from a circulating library 'is the frivolity of its furniture, and the loss of time incurred'.²⁰

Even more than her fear that she failed aesthetically in her novel, Maria's ambivalence towards *The Noble Enthusiast* may have more to do with her changing sentiments about the genre itself, the result of her immersion (literally in one respect) into Evangelical Christianity and Baptist nonconformity. Her close friend Mary Egerton Scott talks about reading novels in January 1789, but by 1796 Scott's attitude towards the sentimental novel had hardened considerably.²¹ It is not improbable that the same shift in attitude occurred with Maria, and her friend may well have contributed to that shift. Scott addresses novel-reading in the first chapter of *The Path to Happiness*, her sentiments taken mostly from an anonymous article that appeared in the *Lounger* on 18 June 1785.²² Those who are 'fascinated in early life by the perusal of novels and romances', she writes,

have deluded themselves with the hope of enjoyments never to be realized, qualifications neither to be attained or even desired, and characters which are no where to be found. Of all the various evils that corrupt the minds of youth in the present day, there are many less specious, but none more injurious than this. Speaking of Rousseau an admired author observes, 'that amongst his irregularities it must be reckoned, that he is sometimes moral, and moral in a very sublime strain. But the *general spirit* and *tendency* of his works is mischievous ... the pathetick tales and *elegant distresses* with which they abound, instead of inspiring sentiments of enlarged and disinterested benevolence, rather tend to steel the heart against those daily scenes of misery which it is our duty to compassionate and relieve ...' (below, pp. 209–10)

Scott reiterates the criticisms of Reeve's Hortensius, predicting her future alliance with Hannah More and the creation of inexpensive religious tracts, in which the imagination is used to serve a moral, social and spiritual purpose, not merely an aesthetic one (although Scott's fear of the sentimental novel is governed by its power to corrupt society). Sentimental novels produce discontent, a dangerous quality for a young lady to imbibe. 'Introduced, as it were, into a higher region',

and aspiring after more refined enjoyments; she sighs to meet some *kindred spirit* who can share in all the emotions of her heart. The sentimental and exalted endearments of love and friendship are, in her eyes, the only source of all genuine felicity: and as it is always easy to believe what we wish, if an object endowed with powers to please present himself, fancy will readily supply every deficiency, and pourtray a perfect character; while the highest satisfaction of which the human mind is capable will be expected to result from his society. (below, p. 210)

'Fancy' readily supplies all deficiencies of character, creating the 'perfect character' who, unfortunately, bears no relation to reality, the same 'danger' Barbauld would later warn about in her *Essay*, in which the imagination 'fixes the standard of virtue and delicacy too high for real use'.²³

The Noble Enthusiast, written during her late teens, is not Maria Saffery's best work, by any means. In its extreme sentimentality and profuse, excessive prose style (not unlike some of the prose in the early letters that passed between her and her sister), she is not altogether out of step with many of her colleagues at the Minerva Press. Her novel, however, does nothing to invalidate the condemnation by Coleridge, Lamb and other Romantic writers of the insipid prose all too prevalent in the novels that issued from the Minerva Press. *The Noble Enthusiast*, however, serves as a watershed in the spiritual life of Maria Grace Andrews, for by the time of the novel's completion her interests were already moving towards a militant spirituality that, like her friend Mary Scott, would find the typical sentimental novel increasingly problematic. At first glance, her title might have suggested to some readers a religious motive, since 'enthusiasm' had long been associated with Methodists and Quakers, and at times even evangelicals among the Baptists, Independents and the followers of George Whitefield. Maria Andrews, however, was anything but a religious enthusiast in 1791, confining the enthusiasm in her novel to the realm of romance, not religion. Within the next three years, though, both she and her sister would join the Baptist church in Salisbury, a move that, in the eyes of some, especially her father, would indeed be linked to religious enthusiasm. Maria, however, would not have viewed her new faith as excessive, nor would she have necessarily rejected being called an 'enthusiast', preferring, however, to be a humble, not a noble, one.

Mary Egerton Scott (c. 1765–1840)

Though devout Anglicans, Mary Egerton Scott and Jane Adams Houseman have been included in this volume because of their close friendships and doctrinal sympathies (both were evangelical Calvinists) with Maria Andrews Saffery and Elizabeth Coltman, respectively. Mary Egerton was the sister of Thomas Egerton, bookseller, Charing Cross, 1784–1830, and John Egerton, with whom Thomas traded in 1784–95. Thomas Egerton also operated the Military Library from 1796 to 1802.²⁴ His father had been a military man, which may explain the latter connection. Egerton's greatest claim to fame as a book publisher is the fact that he was the first London publisher of the novels of Jane Austen. Both brothers appear in several of the early letters of Mary Egerton. Apparently, relations between Thomas and John became strained in the late 1780s, and John left England and lived for a time in Jamaica, returning in late 1789 or early 1790 in poor health yet

determined to join a naval ship at Woolwich, a decision that greatly displeased his brother. Mary Egerton writes to Mrs Andrews on 25 January 1790,

My Brother is to join at Woolwich next Thursd^y – You remember the anxieties I felt for him on his arrival from Jamaica – My hopes & fears I entertained – alas! the former are not yet realized – he remains unestablished in Health – unchanged in Sentiment – & tho' of late he has been guilty of no particular irregularity – has by disagreements &c entirely lost the favor of M^r T. Egerton!²⁵

She writes to Mrs Andrews again on 3 March and regrettably informs her 'that a certain Character mentioned in my last, has left England & will I suppose henceforth be employed in Military arrangements for the Patriots – Thus much for intelligence extraordinary!²⁶ By 1794 John was back in London and apparently no longer in the navy, but his health was broken; he died on 17 January 1795 of rheumatic fever.²⁷

Given her close connections with Mrs Andrews and her two daughters, whom Egerton refers to as her 'sisters' (a term used as well by Maria and Anne), it seems probable that Mary Egerton served for a time as a governess/teacher in the school operated by Mrs Andrews at Isleworth in the late 1780s, where she contributed significantly to the education of both Maria and Anne. During her stay in the Andrews's home, Egerton became a kind of elder sister to the two girls, providing academic, social and spiritual guidance in a home that was clearly not 'evangelical' in its expression of Christianity. Mr Andrews is described by Anne in two letters as a 'deist', and Mrs Andrew, Egerton writes in another letter, has Arian sympathies.²⁸ By August 1788, when Egerton's letters begin, she was in her early twenties and living in Grovesnor Square, a fashionable street about three blocks south of Oxford Street, between Upper Brook Street and Brook Street, in Westminster, London. The square was built in the 1720s and was the largest square in the West End at that time. Most likely, she was living with her relations, either her brother Thomas or possibly William Tatton Egerton, who lived in the square until 1797 (he may be the father of Thomas, John and Mary Egerton).²⁹ She was also spending considerable time in the home of a 'Mrs N.' in Grosvenor Square, in this case not as a governess but as a companion, a situation many educated single women used as a means of employment at this time.³⁰ Some of her neighbours also appear in her letters, including James Woodhouse, bookseller and publisher of *Cheynt Sing*.

Not long after leaving the employ of Mrs Andrews, Egerton began serving either as a governess or possibly a companion/assistant (her exact relationship is not clear from the letters) to Mrs Scott, wife of Rev. Thomas Scott (1747–1821), a close friend of John Newton and author of the popular *Family Bible and Commentary* (1788–92). After serving as vicar of a small parish near Olney (where he first met Newton and John Ryland Jr of Northampton), Scott became chaplain

of Lock Hospital in London in 1785, remaining until 1803, when he moved to Aston Sandford, Buckinghamshire. There he served as vicar and assisted in the training of missionaries for the Church Missionary Society until his death in 1821. As a writer, he espoused, in a more exegetical manner, the same evangelical principles his friends Newton and William Wilberforce had made popular in their preaching and writing. His popularity was great among both Anglicans and Calvinist nonconformists, as demonstrated by his relations with the Andrews sisters after they became Baptists and his long-standing friendship with John Ryland Jr.³¹

Thomas Scott's first wife (she appears in several of Egerton's letters in Volume 6) unexpectedly died after a short illness on 8 September 1790. Scott now found himself in a precarious situation with four children under the age of thirteen, burdensome preaching and writing commitments, the absence of any relations living nearby and a deep depression over his wife's death. His solution was Mary Egerton, and less than two months after his wife's death, on 4 November 1790, Scott married Egerton.³² The marriage was a clear breach of the generally accepted time of bereavement for a widow or widower, and many in London, both friends and strangers to Scott, thought the action highly inappropriate.

Thomas Scott, in a brief history attached to one of the later editions of the *Commentary*, addressed the issue of his quick second marriage:

in September 1790, my wife died; while my hands were full of employment, and my heart of most overwhelming cares: so that my distress and anguish, at that period, were beyond whatever will be known or conceived by others, at least in this world. But the Lord, in unspeakable mercy, gave me my present wife, who has proved in every respect a blessing to me and my children; a very useful assistant in my various labours; and I trust an instrument of good to numbers.³³

The last phrase is an oblique reference to Mary Scott's publications, a reference that, unfortunately, still denied her any real authorial recognition. Scott knew at the time of his proposal to Egerton that his actions would provoke considerable criticism, and he sought the immediate advice and approval of a group of his ministerial friends in London, which included Newton. John Scott later defended his father's actions:

I shall add little to what my father has here said upon this subject. Of the overwhelming distress which he felt on my mother's decease, I could bear striking testimony: and many could join me in declaring the tender affection with which he ever cherished her memory. If any one should be ready to think the fact of his marrying again, within much less time than is usual on such occasions, an evidence to the contrary, I confidently affirm that such a person is mistaken; and I fully believe that, if the whole case could be fairly laid before a wise and impartial judge, he would justify my father's conduct ... His situation was peculiar nor was his character quite of the ordinary standard. I am persuaded he acted rightly, and that the blessing of heaven followed the step he took.³⁴

Though his ministerial friends granted him a measure of approval, Scott continued for some time to defend his actions, writing to the husband of his deceased wife's sister on 4 April 1791, fully aware that her relations and friends in the north 'would not be very well pleased with the step which you have heard I have taken'. Nevertheless, he insists he 'acted most conscientiously':

A variety of peculiarities in my situation, disposition, &c. rendered it necessary for me to deviate from the etiquette of human custom, if I would go on with my many and important undertakings with a quiet mind. I have no doubt that your dear deceased sister, could she come to give her opinion, would sanction my conduct ... No body, that knows me, and my behaviour to her, from the time we met till that most distressing hour of my life when the Lord separated us for a season, will suppose that my conduct arose from want to love to her, or of respect for her memory; which will be dear to me to my latest hour³⁵

In a letter to his deceased wife's mother on 5 August 1791, almost a year after his wife's death, he again defends his actions:

If you knew all that God knows of the circumstances in which I have been placed, you could not blame, you would approve of the step I have taken since it pleased God to take your dear daughter to himself. Situated and engaged as I was it was literally impossible for me to proceed in any other way³⁶

Apparently, even by 1822, when John Scott published his *Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott*, the quick remarriage to Egerton was still a damper on his father's reputation, requiring the inclusion of the above letters, all of which demonstrate the angst Scott felt over his hasty action.

After their marriage, the Scotts continued as friends and spiritual advisors to the Andrews sisters, who by 1793 were moving in Baptist circles in Salisbury and in London (represented by the Safferys in Salisbury and the family of John Saffery's brother-in-law, John Shoveller, who lived in London, 1791–6). Though membership and baptism into the Baptist church in Brown Street was not something the Scotts found necessary or advisable, they did not deem it a sufficient cause for any diminution in their friendship with Maria and Anne. As the correspondence in Volume 6 makes clear, communications between Mrs Scott and the two sisters continued long after their marriages to Philip Whitaker and John Saffery in the late 1790s; in fact, during the late 1820s, one of Anne Whitaker's sons attended a boarding school operated by Thomas Scott Jr at Gawcott.³⁷

In 1825, four years after the death of Thomas Scott, Mary Scott remarried, this time to a Mr Dawes, an event that apparently did not sit well with John Scott and his siblings. Philip Whitaker informed Maria Saffery on 7 May 1825 that a few days earlier her sister had received a letter from their old friend 'M^{rs} Dawes (late Scott) after years of silence – she pleads the best excuse she can I suppose for marrying but by some hints we imagine the family or part of them have

been much hurt'.³⁸ Relations between Mary Scott and her stepson John, now a minister and schoolmaster at Hull, may have been poor by the time of Thomas Scott's death in 1821. The next year, in his biography of his father, the younger Scott included only the following comment on his stepmother:

Indeed, no person could be more happy than my father was, in both his marriages. Of the person who formed the object of his second choice, as she survives him, I shall say nothing more, than that the whole family concurs in the sentence which my father pronounced on his dying bed, 'That she had been an unspeakable blessing to him and his for more than thirty years.'³⁹

A compliment, to be sure, but considering the young ages of the four children that were essentially raised by Mary Egerton Scott, and given her thirty years of marriage to Thomas Scott as well as the success of her own writings during that time, it seems unconscionable that John Scott could not have found room in his volume for more than one sentence on his stepmother. Scott did add at the end of his volume an advertisement of some works still in print by his father, and a listing of the five printed works by Mary Scott, identified only as '*Written by Mrs. ******', her identity still hidden after more than two decades.

In the 1825 edition of the *Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott*, John Scott altered his brief description of his stepmother to include a clearer identification of her while at the same time removing the complimentary statement that his father had been happy in 'both his marriages'. 'The person who formed the object of this his second choice', Scott now writes, 'was Miss Egerton, the daughter of an officer in the army. She was, for some time previous to his acquaintance with her, a constant attendant at the Lock Chapel, and had derived great benefit from his ministry.'⁴⁰ The statement in no way corresponds with what the letters in Volume 6 reveal about Mary Egerton's involvement in the home of Scott prior to the death of the first Mrs Scott in September 1790.⁴¹ Why John Scott would deem it necessary to identify her in this manner at this time seems odd unless it was designed to expose her in some way for her remarriage that same year. The advertisement for his stepmother's writings did not reappear in this edition, even though at least three of them were still in print by the Religious Tract Society throughout the 1820s. The final word on Mary Egerton Scott comes from Anne Whitaker's diary, in which she inserts the news of her old friend's death as part of her entry on 28 May 1840:

Heard this day of the death of one of my earliest and dearest friends – one who was made very useful to me in directing my thoughts to the all important concerns of eternity. She proved for many years a safeguard to my inexperienced youth and through her I was introduced to that most estimable Servant of God the late reverend Thomas Scott whose friendship was indeed a blessing.

My friend was a person of varied endowments – She possessed a vigorous intellect, much taste and many graces of manner her understanding was highly cultivated and her heart deeply impressed by religious truth God grant that after a long separation on earth we may meet before the throne of God and the lamb to celebrate the riches of that grace by which we have been brought through the sorrows and temptations of time to the unutterable bliss of eternity.⁴²

Whitaker's tribute to Mary Scott is more than fitting, as it recalls Scott's advisory role during Anne's teenage years at Isleworth and recognizes her friend's 'vigorous intellect', 'highly cultivated' understanding and 'deeply impressed' religious beliefs, all demonstrated in Scott's publications (three of which are reprinted below) and in her thirteen letters published in Volume 6.

Even though Mary Egerton Scott has endured anonymity as a writer since the early nineteenth century, her work was not completely unknown within the evangelical circles of London.⁴³ In a review of *Plain Truth for Plain People* in the *Christian Observer* in 1807, the reviewer singles out a particular statement from Scott's advertisement, and in so doing reveals the author's gender. Scott's desire 'that the poor and ignorant should be instructed as much as possible in the divine original, and reasonableness, of our religion' (below, p. 258) through the reading of her pamphlet provoked the reviewer to comment,

Such motives as these would go a great way in disarming criticism of its severity, even if there were any thing in the author's execution of his or rather *her* purpose (for we understand the writer to be a lady, who has already contributed largely to the instruction of the lower classes) which called for animadversion. We think she has performed her task very creditably, and has contrived to convey to her readers much useful information, in an attractive shape. She interests while she instructs them. Those who have occasion to witness the prevalence of an infidel or irreligious spirit in their neighbourhood, will perform a real act of charity by the distribution of this tract.⁴⁴

Her previous contributions 'to the instruction of the lower classes' is most likely a reference to her previous pamphlets, which, as the reviewer makes clear, were known within evangelical circles in London. Her reputation for instructing the poor was not unlike her fellow Anglican evangelical writer from the West Country and old friend of Anne and Mary Steele, Hannah More (1745–1833), whose Cheap Repository Tracts had sold more than two million copies by 1798. In its earthy dialogues between two working-class characters, Scott's *Plain Truth* bears striking similarities to More's *Village Politics* (1792), especially in its criticism of Thomas Paine.⁴⁵ The reviewer also recognized the evolution of the moral tract by 1807 and its increasing emphasis upon providing 'useful information, in an attractive shape', invoking the writer's need to grab the 'interests' of working-class readers while still 'instructing' them.⁴⁶

The Path to Happiness consists of a series of six discourses on traditional Christian themes, such as 'the vanity of human pursuits', the truth (or 'inerrancy') of

biblical revelation and the secrets of a happy family. The work combines some mild theological exegesis with fervent exhortations and practical guides to attaining and maintaining a state of moral and spiritual affluence, the key to happiness in this life and the next. Scott's opening chapter is similar to Mary Steele's prose meditation 'Thoughts on Discontent' (composed in 1775 but not printed until 1814), as well as the meditations of Hannah Towgood Wakeford and Jane Attwater Blatch.⁴⁷ In their meditations (both published and unpublished), these women recorded their thoughts on various biblical themes, supporting their arguments not only from scripture but also from literature, nature and personal experience. In their prose writings, these women never hesitate to assume as part of their authorial persona the authority (not the actual role) of the preacher, an authority accessible to them through their anonymity and readily granted them by their audience as a result of their proficiency as writers.⁴⁸

Scott's primary audience for *The Path to Happiness* was middle- to upper-class Christians in need of spiritual enlightenment, revival or, in some cases, possibly conversion. For her other two works reprinted in this volume, however, the poor were her main audience, with intellectual improvement now giving way to the higher callings of spiritual conversion and moral and social reformation, the chief ends of the early nineteenth-century evangelical tract. *The History of Mrs. Wilkins* and *Plain Truth for Plain People* are conventional moral tracts that enjoyed wide distribution by evangelicals in their mission to evangelize the working classes of England and beyond. Mrs Wilkins had married a ne'er-do-well, her irritable temperament only contributing to his constant frequenting of the local pub. Her unkempt house, dirty children and lack of prudence in financial matters exacerbate the situation to the breaking point. Her Christian neighbour offers hope for her and her family, but Mrs Wilkins will have to make some changes in her lifestyle, such as submissiveness to her husband, cleanliness in the home, frugality with her money and regular attendance at church. Mrs Wilkins rejects her neighbour's advice. Shortly thereafter, however, she is afflicted with a serious illness, calls for assistance from her neighbour and this time is converted. She now experiences a spiritual and physical renewal, the evidence of which (her bad habits are all exchanged for good ones) eventually transforms her husband as well. The Wilkinses remain poor, but now they are kind, clean, contented and Christian. Scott closes the tract with an open call to repentance that would be indistinguishable from the close of most Sunday sermons by countless evangelical ministers. Scott mounts her printed pulpit and delivers stern pronouncements to her readers, especially pregnant women, whose minds, like that of the 'old' Mrs Wilkins, are all too often not properly focused on spiritual concerns. 'Do not forget the pains you have felt', she warns, 'and return with a vain light heart to the world: but consider if *these* pains are so

dreadful to endure, what must be the bitter pains of ETERNAL DEATH!' (below, p. 256).

Plain Truth for Plain People reveals that the fear of infidelity, one of the chief reasons by 1800 among nonconformists for defeating the French, was still prevalent in 1807.⁴⁹ Many within the Evangelical establishment viewed the poor working classes as a seedbed for infidelity because of their lack of church attendance, illiteracy and general ignorance.⁵⁰ Scott's story presents three dialogues between two carpenters, Joseph Chisel and Thomas Wood, both literate in terms of being able to read and write, but Wood is completely illiterate in spiritual matters. As his friend Chisel shares scriptural knowledge with him, fearful his friend has already become (or soon will become) a pronounced infidel, Wood begins to see the truth of Christianity and sets out to mend his ways before it is too late. What is interesting in this tract is that most of the teaching being imparted from Joseph to Thomas is not the result of Joseph's knowledge, but rather his sharing of biblical knowledge gleaned from his minister, an evangelical vicar patterned after the likes of Thomas Scott, John Newton and even Robert Houseman of Leicester, Jane Houseman's husband and the hero of *The History of Susan Ward*. In Dialogue II, Joseph recounts to Thomas a previous conversation he has had with the minister, prefacing his retelling with the disclaimer, 'I'll try to tell you the substance of it, as far as I can remember'. At the end of the discourse, Thomas marvels at his memory. 'You know', Joseph replies, 'I am pretty ready with my pen; and so, as soon as I got home, I put it all down directly, for substance, in black and white. And now, I often find it does me so much good to read it over, that I believe I have almost got it by rote' (below, pp. 262, 268). What is more telling than Joseph's remarkable memory is Mary Scott's ability to recreate so authentically the *voice* of the evangelical minister as he provides spiritual instruction to his parishioner. In so doing, her voice as writer becomes one with the voice of the preacher. Though her anonymity is reinforced through the nameless, genderless title page, it is that very anonymity that ironically allows her to preach through her imaginative creations with a forcefulness and specificity that would never have been allowed in a public pulpit for an evangelical Calvinist woman in 1807.

Elizabeth Coltman (1761–1838)⁵¹

Sometime during the 1820s Elizabeth Coltman opened a school for young ladies in Leicester; her interest in children's education, however, began long before then. In 1799 she published a thin volume titled *Plain Tales, Chiefly Intended for the Use of Charity Schools*.⁵² On 14 May 1799 Mary Steele Dunscombe wrote to her sister Martha in London, hoping she might be able to acquire a copy of *Plain Tales*, which had appeared the previous month. 'I have sent in vain for Miss

Coltman's little Book entitled *Plain Tales*, she writes. '[P]erhaps you may like to enquire for it. It is printed for Vernott [*sic*] & Hood.'⁵³ Dunscombe eventually got her copy of *Plain Tales*, but she did not keep it for long. In the summer of 1801 she presented it as a gift to Annajane Blatch, daughter of her close friend Jane Attwater Blatch, on a visit by the Blatches to Dunscombe at Yeovil, where she was living at the time. That same copy now resides in the Children's Book Collection in the Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California at Los Angeles, bearing the following inscription by Jane Blatch: 'Annajane Blatch's Book the Gift of M^{rs} Dunscombe when we was on a visit at Yeovil July 18th 1801 – written by Miss Eliza Coltman.' Annajane would have been eight years of age at the time; she would die of consumption in 1809.⁵⁴

Plain Tales is indicative of the popularity of moral tales aimed at poor children who were fortunate enough to attend a charity school.⁵⁵ Like the tracts of Mary Egerton Scott, the primary purpose of these works, whether short histories or fictive tales, was to inculcate moral, spiritual and, in some cases, political lessons for the growing number of new readers among the poor and labouring class in England. These works gained considerable popularity after the phenomenal success of Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795–7) and the founding of the Religious Tract Society in 1799.⁵⁶ If *The Noble Enthusiast* represented some of the worst features of the typical three-volume sentimental tale popular among the readers of circulating libraries in the 1790s, provoking stinging condemnations by the literary elite, among the poor and working classes there was a growing literature of cheap one-penny chapbooks of 8, 12 or 24 pages that was creating great concern among the evangelical elite, not for its aesthetic faults but rather its lack of clear moral and religious teachings. The productions of the Cheap Repository and the Religious Tract Society were largely aimed at creating a cheap evangelical alternative to the racy, secular tales hawked so successfully by the London booksellers.⁵⁷

As Mary Steele Dunscombe's gift of *Plain Tales* to Annajane Blatch makes clear, however, not all readers of these new moral and religious tales were poor.⁵⁸ *Plain Tales* contains eight stories in its final version, all of which exemplify the pervasive principles of hard work, prudence, honesty, cleanliness, frugality and contentment common to these tracts. The last quality was what More and many writers of this new genre thought the most important quality the poor could possess. In Coltman's first story, Sukey Dawkins and Polly Wood, two charity-school girls, ask Mr Ownoak for some woodchips, a commodity their mothers desperately need. Ownoak, a benevolent landowner, grants their request, but as the girls load their aprons, the quality of their clothes becomes emblematic of the quality of their *character*. Sukey's woollen apron is far superior in strength to Polly's tattered one, and, accordingly, Polly's apron breaks on the way home, spilling her wood chips on the ground. Sukey helps her get most of them home

and exacts a promise from her friend to mend her apron the next day. Sukey's prudence and sagacity pays dividends not only for the *present* welfare of her family (her mother praises her efforts and says she is the only reason the family is not in the workhouse) but also for the *future* success of her friend (who has learned the importance of keeping her apron mended). Coltman closes each story with a moral lesson presented in a quatrain, such as the following from the first story:

Children, in many a different way,
 Can give their friends delight;
 Nor will she pass a useless day,
 Who brings home chips at night. (below, p. 278)

Another story descries the consumption of tea while championing frugality, a story that might be related to Coltman's antipathy to slavery (tea generally required sugar, one of the chief products of West Indian trade). Other characters in the tales include Jenny Bunny, Nancy Thoughtless, Sally Idle, Dolly Careless, Phoebe Talkative and Nancy Diligent, all names emblematic of desirable or undesirable character traits in children.

Besides *Plain Tales*, Coltman published two more works for children, *Instructive Hints, in Easy Lessons, for Children* (which appeared in two parts in one volume in 1806) and *Familiar Letters Addressed to Children and Young Persons of the Middle Ranks* (1811), both published by the London firm of Darton & Harvey, the same firm who published the early works for children by Jane and Ann Taylor.⁵⁹ All of these works, including *Plain Tales*, were published anonymously, and all have been erroneously attributed by various sources to Elizabeth Coltman Heyrick (1769–1831), Coltman's Leicester friend and writer.⁶⁰ Coltman's authorship of *Instructive Hints* can be verified by the title page of the 1806 edition of *Plain Tales*, also published by Darton & Harvey, which attributes the work to E**** C*****. *Author of "Instructive Hints"*. Some libraries have incorrectly assumed that this is Heyrick, citing the work as by 'Elizabeth Coltman, afterward Heyrick'. It is true she was Elizabeth Coltman prior to her marriage to John Heyrick in 1787, but by 1806 she would never have referred to herself, in public or in private, by her maiden name. Though Elizabeth Coltman is virtually unknown today, she was not so in her own time, for Catherine Hutton Beale refers to her often in *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends* (1895), revealing the familiarity that existed between the two unrelated Coltman families of Leicester (they worshipped together at both the Great Meeting and at Harvey Lane) and the two Elizabeths, both of whom would become significant writers. Coltman's writings published in the current volume, as well as her poetry, periodical prose and letters published in Volumes 3 and 4, have been properly identified for the first time, providing material for a complete history of Elizabeth Coltman that

finally distinguishes her and her writings from that of Elizabeth Coltman Heyrick.⁶¹

More evidence of Coltman's authorship of the above works can be found in an inscription to a copy of *The Warning. Recommended to the Serious Attention of all Christians, and Lovers of their Country*, another short work by Coltman originally published by Darton & Harvey c. 1805–6 and reprinted in Philadelphia in 1807.⁶² The copy, now belonging to the Angus Library, was given to Robert Edminson, Baptist minister at Bratton, by his friend and fellow church member Jane Attwater Blatch, dated by Edminson on the inside cover, 'March 27, 1812'. He added a more telling inscription beneath the title: 'By Eliza Coltman, Leicester. Author of Instructive Hints; Plain Tales, or The Advantages of Industry; and Familiar Letters, addressed to Children and Young Persons of the Middle Ranks.'⁶³ Most likely Edminson received this information about Coltman's publications directly from Blatch, who had known the writer since the mid-1780s and had seen her as recently as November 1810, when Coltman visited the West Country on her final trip to Broughton to see Mary Steele Dunscombe. Blatch could easily have received copies of Coltman's publications on this visit, one of which being the copy she later gave to her minister.⁶⁴ Edminson's inscription, when coupled with the title of the pamphlet itself, correctly assigns all four works to their rightful author, Elizabeth Coltman of Leicester.⁶⁵ Coltman's *Warning* joins Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation; or, A Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793* (1793) as powerful examples of political pamphlets by women during the long war against France aimed at promoting a national repentance and scriptural criteria for the actions and character of politicians. Barbauld would not have agreed with Coltman's use of biblical prophecy as the foundation for her complaint against the English government during the height of the Napoleonic Wars (whether Edminson agreed is also uncertain), but both Barbauld and Edminson would have concurred with Coltman's call for a national repentance and a return to morality and godliness.

Though Coltman would not open her own school for many years, it is probable she began working with the Sunday school at the Great Meeting in the 1790s and continued with the school at Harvey Lane after she moved her membership there in 1807. She may also have worked in a charity school during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The narrator in *Instructive Hints* assumes the persona of a teacher who imparts 'hints', or 'useful' information, about reading and books as well as domestic pets and farm animals, fish and bees to her students through creative object lessons in language accessible to young children. As she contends in the inscription she added to the 1806 edition of *Plain Tales*: 'The children of the Poor can never be taught to read with facility and pleasure, unless they have Books exactly levelled to their capacities' (below, p. 276). Throughout the illustrated volume, all multisyllabic words are divided by hyphens. The

teacher instructs the children about how paper is made – from ‘rags; old rags, which are no long-er use-ful to us as clothes’ – warns them to take proper care of their books and, of course, exhorts them in the virtues of early rising, industry, frugality, kindness, and contentment. The teacher admonishes her pupils not to abuse animals, even warning the young girls about the dangers of stays made from whalebone. The final lesson comes from the bee, who teaches the children, and all readers for that matter, to be ‘di-li-gent in do-ing the work ap-point-ed for us, and hap-py in ful-fill-ing the will of our Ma-ker’ (below, p. 314).

Coltman’s educational philosophy owed more to John Locke than Jean-Jacques Rousseau, if accounts by her great-niece are correct, her school’s curriculum centred upon morality and religion. An undated poem by Coltman, ‘Written in a Volume of Rousseau’s Works’, transcribed by Martha Steele, Mary Steele’s younger half-sister, into a commonplace book of poems sometime in the late 1790s or early 1800s, offers more insights, albeit obliquely, into her educational philosophy. In the poem, ‘Faith’, ‘Virtue’ and ‘Peace’ withstand the temptations of the seductive sentiments of Rousseau (by that time having grown in disfavour due to his radical political philosophy and, to some extent, his proximity to religious infidelity) if held firmly by the Christian reader; otherwise, Coltman fears, embracing Rousseau’s philosophy might be madness.⁶⁶ Rousseau’s novels, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Emile* (1762), were widely read in England in the last half of the eighteenth century, though not without controversy. Emma Courtney, the heroine of Mary Hays’s novel of the same name, exclaims after reading *Héloïse*,

With what transport, with what enthusiasm, did I peruse this dangerous, enchanting, work! – How shall I paint the sensations that were excited in my mind! – the pleasure I experienced approached the limits of pain – it was tumult – all the ardour of my character was excited.⁶⁷

The Memoirs of Emma Courtney appeared in 1796, the same year Elizabeth Coltman embarked with her friends on a ‘ramble’ to the Lakes, celebrating the simplicity of rural cottage life and the sublimity of nature (epitomized by her climb to the summits of Helmcrag and Skiddaw) while deliberately employing her wit and beauty to provoke the romantic passions of her young friend, Samuel Coltman. If his journal is correct, up to the age of thirty-five Elizabeth Coltman possessed a brilliant imagination and an infectious passion for life, an enthusiasm at times some thought a bit improper, or, to use Emma Courtney’s word, ‘dangerous’ for a woman her age.⁶⁸ By the early 1800s, however, Elizabeth Coltman had exchanged her earlier enthusiasm for a romantic sensibility and the ‘sensations’ of ‘pleasure’ or ‘tumult’ (again to use Courtney’s words) for the pleasures and sensations of a new order, gained primarily through spiritual meditation and religious, familial and educational activity.

After the death of Mary Steele Dunscombe in November 1813, Elizabeth Coltman wrote to Anne Steele Tomkins:

Time which in common cases heals the wounds made by death, only serves by its lapse to make me feel more deeply, my *irreparable* loss. I never met with a character very similar to that of our friend, & should such an one exist, it is not likely to come in contact with a being shrinking from society.⁶⁹

Dunscombe's death left a void in Coltman's life that was never filled. After 1813 she grew more reclusive, though she remained active in the Baptist congregation at Harvey Lane during the ministry of Robert Hall (Anne Steele Tomkins's former suitor in the 1780s), whose congregation included Mary Reid, Coltman's lifelong friend and also friend to Dunscombe in her later years; Samuel Coltman, Elizabeth Coltman's ardent admirer on their jaunt through the Lake District in 1796; and other members of both Coltman families. Coltman also turned to writing once again, composing the first version of *The Schoolmistress; or, The True History of Jenny Hickling*, her popular work published by the Religious Tract Society around 1815. The tract appeared in numerous editions (often with illustrations and, in some cases, with substantive changes and additions by Coltman) in England, America and even India, where it was translated into the Tamil dialect by Church of England missionaries and published by the Church Mission Press in Madras in 1835. In her tract Coltman narrates the life of Jenny Hickling, a woman from Wimeswold, Leicestershire, who, though bedridden for all of her adult life, steadfastly responded to her hardships as a true Christian saint, with patience and humility, supporting her family by conducting a school, providing readers 'a bright example of the power of divine grace upon the heart of the Christian' (below, p. 323). After Hickling's death in May 1822 (she was 75), Coltman revised her tract, with new editions appearing into the 1850s.

During the 1820s Coltman's primary concern was overseeing the education of her four great-nieces, the daughters of her nephew, Edward Cooper: Alicia (1814–94) and Mary (1815–84), neither of whom married; Elizabeth (1817–74), who married George Barton Franklin (1815–93), the son of the Baptist minister of Coventry and later the principal of the Stoneygate School in Leicester; and Anne (1818–87), who married G. B. Dyer, Franklin's cousin. The four girls initially attended a day school in the Spa, with Coltman working with them on weekends, even once assigning them John Foster's *Essays* (1805). At some point the girls also attended Coltman's school. As Florence Skillington writes, using a phrase from Alicia Cooper's *Reminiscences*, 'It is no wonder that these stodgy exercises and the old lady's ungenial attitude towards themselves blinded the little Coopers to "her elegant movements and refined manners"'.⁷⁰ Cooper writes about life in the mid-1820s with her aunt:

I have said that my aunt was beautiful. She was also intellectual, fastidious, proud, mean, fond of the great and very severe. In her intercourse with us, the great disparity of the years between us was doubtless much more trying to her than we were aware of. She had seen the intervening generation, on whom she had bestowed much anxiety and care, pass away without an exception, and the fountain of her kindness was well-nigh exhausted. How well we remember the nip on the arm for mistakes in reading, and the thrust down the dark steps of the cellar for a little misbehaviour. She had a leading desire for our moral and intellectual proficiency, and was continually preaching to us on the subjugation of self, and exhorting us to “conquer ourselves and master French,” the former especially. But she seemed to perceive no medium between being so bad as to be on the ‘highway to perdition’ and so good as to be “ripening for glory.”⁷¹

At some point in the mid-1820s, Coltman sent her great-nieces to a Baptist boarding school in Coventry run by Mary and Rebecca Franklin, daughters of the local Baptist minister. One of their students was Mary Anne Evans, the future novelist George Eliot. Elizabeth Cooper, following her aunt’s lead, also spent time as a ‘pupil-teacher’ at a school at Brixton Hill, south London, kept by a Mrs James, before marrying G. B. Franklin in 1841.⁷²

Sometime prior to the departure of her great-nieces for Coventry, Elizabeth Coltman opened her own day school for young ladies, joining a significant group of women educators who appear in these volumes: Mary Scott (author of *The Female Advocate*), Mary and Sarah Froude, Mrs Andrews, Mary Egerton Scott, Maria Saffery, Anne Whitaker and Frances Ryland. Coltman’s school was located in one of the Stepped Houses, on the east side of the London Road in Leicester; her curriculum was designed for the daughters of professional men and manufacturers in Leicester. Among the girls who attended were Sarah and Anne Biggs, sisters to John Biggs (who would thrice serve as mayor of Leicester); and Mary Kirby (1817–93), whose family were also members at Harvey Lane during Hall’s ministry. Kirby, who would later become a popular writer of children’s books, described Coltman as ‘rather a melancholy lady’ who, after a few years, grew tired of the work (she would have been in her sixties at the time) and turned it over to her cousin, Lydia Coltman of Lichfield, who later moved it to High Street in Leicester.⁷³

After she closed her school, Coltman returned to the Newarke, living within sight of her birthplace, attended now only by a devoted family servant. Coltman was not very good at domestic matters, her great-niece wrote, but spent most of her time reading ‘the best English and French authors and a little Latin.’⁷⁴ She remained active in the affairs at Harvey Lane, even after Robert Hall left in 1826 to return to Bristol and the Broadmead church.⁷⁵ She also continued to support the cause of abolition, especially after the formation of the Leicester Auxiliary of the Abolition Society, before which Robert Hall gave a celebrated speech in 1824.⁷⁶ As Alicia Cooper noted in her *Reminiscences*,

There was no doubt that Miss Coltman's conversation and letters were much esteemed in a select circle of educated and thoughtful women, among whom were Susannah Watts, Mary Steele (niece of 'Theodosia'), and Mrs. Elizabeth Heyrick (née Coltman) and her sister, Mary Ann Coltman.⁷⁷ These ladies were enthusiastic supporters of the movement for the abolition of slavery, and they showed their sincerity by using nothing but East Indian sugar for several years.⁷⁸

Coltman continued to travel occasionally, taking Alicia Cooper to London sometime during the mid-1820s. As they walked the streets of Hackney and Stoke Newington, Coltman pointed out the location of the boarding school she and her sisters attended in the 1760s and 1770s, as well as the houses where some of her schoolmates had lived.⁷⁹

The last mention of Elizabeth Coltman in any of the letters in the Coltman Collection in the Leicestershire Record Office is by Mary Reid, who wrote to Samuel Coltman on 2 September 1836, asking if he had heard anything from the writer Susanna Watts. 'E. Coltman never writes,' Reid complains, '& I know not where she is.'⁸⁰ It is possible Coltman had become too ill to write at that time, but more than likely she may have gone on one final visit (it seems unlikely Reid would not have known that Coltman was living in the Newarke at that time) to her cottage at Newtown Linford, Leicestershire, where in 1828 she penned her last known poem. The closing lines depict a mental state in her final years that offers some fleeting echoes of the earlier romantic sensibilities she shared with Mary Steele. After receiving a gift from Coltman of an aeolian harp made by Robert Bloomfield, Mary Steele (now Mrs Dunscombe) composed a poem to Coltman, opening with an apostrophe to the spirit of the wind:

Spirit of harmony, whose power extends
O'er Nature's vast domain; – whose voice is heard
In every breeze, in every murmuring rill,
In every sound when evening's placid smile
Lulls the rude discord of the world to rest.⁸¹

Twenty years later, Coltman now finds herself returning to a similar theme. 'There is a language,' she writes,

in all Nature's forms
In all her mystic sounds, which sweetly tells
What ear hath never heard, nor reason known.⁸²

She still hears the voice of Nature, but her interpretation of its language has changed; romantic notions have given way to a deeply held, religious consolation. The 'forms' of life in nature now 'tell of Him' who formed Coltman 'for immortality and bliss'. As she nears the end of her life, she no longer wishes to climb the mountains of the Lake District as she did in 1796; now her sights are

set on the heavens themselves, where the view is, paradoxically, not down but *up*, not of earth but rather of the 'bright Unseen'. When secluded on St Herbert's Island, she tells us in 'A Hasty Ramble to the Lakes', she had wished to remain its 'resident' forever, discovering a setting that exuded 'truth and peace', a true 'heaven' on earth. Now, as she approaches death, she heeds the divine call, 'Come thou up hither!', commencing a spiritual trek that will take her far beyond the Derwent or the summit of Skiddaw, on to a place where she can truly 'Learn what Redemption's happy sons [and daughters] shall share.'⁸³

Skillington writes that before her death Coltman had the satisfaction 'of knowing that a cause very dear to her heart had been brought to a successful issue', the abolition of slavery throughout the British empire. A 'great public breakfast' was held in Leicester in honour of the event, and three of the Cooper girls (and most likely Elizabeth Coltman) attended.⁸⁴ Skillington writes that in her final years Coltman mellowed considerably, becoming kinder and more tolerant, and caring less about any kind of personal notice. She even regretted, according to Alicia Cooper, that she had been so strict with her great-nieces 'in little things'. They appreciated the change, and came naturally to speak of her as their 'dear aunt'. Cooper and Coltman's elderly servant nursed the poet, writer, educator and abolitionist through the short illness that led to her death in the spring of 1838. Coltman left a fifth part of her estate to each of her great-nieces, and the remaining fifth to her nephew, John Grew of Philadelphia. She left instructions for a 'walking funeral', and accordingly her great-nieces, accompanied by John Coltman, Elizabeth Heyrick's brother, followed her coffin on foot from the Newarke to the Great Meeting, after which she was buried next to her parents in the nonconformist burial ground in Friar Lane.⁸⁵

Jane Adams Houseman (1768–1837)

Jane Houseman, the former Jane Adams of Langton, Leicestershire, would, like Mary Egerton Scott, Maria Grace Andrews and Frances Barrett Ryland, become the second wife of a minister, in her case Rev. Robert Houseman (1759–1838). Houseman met his first wife, a Miss Audley, while a student at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1783 (he took his BA in 1784). Though the Audleys were ardent nonconformists (Independents), they were, like Houseman, also committed evangelical Calvinists. Houseman and Miss Audley were married in January 1785; their marriage was short-lived, however, for Mrs Houseman died later that year while giving birth to a son. At that time, Houseman was ministering in a parish church in Lancaster, and on two occasions in 1785 he and his wife paid visits to Elizabeth Coltman at Leicester. Mrs Houseman's brother, John Audley (1750–1827), a prosperous woolstapler (and later solicitor) in Cambridge, eventually proposed to Coltman, but she rejected him. Audley, however, main-

tained his connections with the Housemans thereafter; in fact, Houseman's only son by his first wife (and Audley's nephew) would later be hanged for committing forgery against Audley in 1815.⁸⁶

After the death of his first wife, Houseman spent several years serving various parishes in and near Langton, Leicestershire, where he met and eventually married Adams in September 1788. She had received an exceptional education under the private tutelage of Thomas Robinson, the popular evangelical clergyman in Leicester and friend of Robert Hall. Her father was Anglican, but for many years he worshipped with the Methodists at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, where the Adamases lived. Her mother became a follower of George Whitefield, an allegiance that caused her father to disinherit her. Fortunately, she was taken in by the Countess of Huntingdon and became her godchild. During her youth, Jane Adams met in her home some of the leading evangelical clergymen in England, including Whitefield, John Wesley, John Newton, John Berridge, William Romaine, Henry Venn, William Mason, John Edwards of Leeds and Thomas Jones of Southwark, London. As Houseman ministered at Langton between 1787 and 1795, he continued his friendship with Coltman, a friendship that now included a close relationship between Coltman and Jane Houseman. In 1796 Houseman returned to Lancaster as rector at St Anne's Church, a position he retained until 1836.

The year before her marriage to Houseman, Jane Adams composed a spiritual 'covenant', as she called it; the concluding portion provides a clear demonstration of her evangelical faith:

If any should see this my Covenant with Thee, O God, may they make the engagement their own; willingly resigning themselves to thee; and do thou graciously accept them, and let them be partakers of Thy Covenant, through Jesus the Mediator of it. Hear this, my prayer, O God, for myself and for others, and keep me under Thy guidance. Guide me in all things. Be my Helper in dangers; my Deliverer in temptations; my Comforter in afflictions; my Strength in weakness; my All in All, through life, and in Death.

Thou are witness, O God, with myself, that I this day vow to be thine; resolving, in Thy strength, to live henceforth unto thee. I sign this my surrender with mine own hand; I seal it with mine own seal; and may the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, help me to fulfil the same.⁸⁷

Her husband's biographer noted that

as a wife, [Jane Houseman] was attentive and affectionate; as a mother, full of the tenderest and most enduring attachment; as a friend, earnest, steady, and disinterested. A sincerer, more benevolent, more truly humble and fervent Christian, never breathed. Her life was a uniform course of practical piety, ever active, ever self-denying

He was obviously familiar with her writings as well, noting that she had 'a quick imagination, great candour of heart and mind, uncompromising honesty of pur-

pose, and determined will to execute it', accompanied by 'a more than ordinary skill in discriminating minute and subtle differences of character'.⁸⁸

In August 1796, Jane Houseman travelled with Elizabeth Coltman on a tour of the Lake District, an adventure recounted by Coltman in her 'Journal, written during a Hasty Ramble to the Lakes'.⁸⁹ The travellers in that group were mainly members of the other Coltman family of Leicester, all of whom were also friends of Houseman: Samuel Coltman, his sister Ann Coltman, their mother Mrs John Coltman, a Miss Evans and Elizabeth Coltman's close friend Mary Reid. Elizabeth Heyrick, her husband still alive at that time, did not accompany the group. Catherine Hutton Beale records the event as follows:

In the month of August, 1796, Mrs. Coltman, with her younger daughter [Ann] and son [Samuel], set out on a journey to the Lakes. At Lancaster they were to be joined by their friends, Mrs. Houseman and Miss Coltman, but some little delay occurring, it was decided that instead of proceeding at once, they should spend a week at Heysham, a little romantic bathing place, on the shore of Morecambe Bay.

Mrs Coltman wrote to Elizabeth Heyrick from Heysham on 7 August 1796, informing her that 'Mrs. Houseman spends half her time here, and Miss Coltman talks seriously of taking up her abode here, while we go to the Lakes. Ann seems to be recruited by bathing'.⁹⁰

Elizabeth Coltman did indeed proceed with the group to the Lakes, but she may have had second thoughts about her obvious flirtation with Samuel Coltman, thirteen years her junior. Samuel was infatuated with Coltman, and his swooning over the older woman, despite being a close family friend, did not go unnoticed by his mother. He records in his journal that 'her motive in accompanying us, was to guard her imprudent son from forming a hasty matrimonial connection with a lady so much older than himself; and whose manners were probably on that account somewhat less reserved towards her youthful admirer, than she thought strictly becoming'.⁹¹ Whether Jane Houseman knew about Elizabeth Coltman's intrigue with Samuel is unclear, but what is certain is that by the second decade of the nineteenth century, both women were deeply religious, employing their energy and creativity to educate and evangelize, both young and old, among the working class of England and America and, through the efforts of the missionary societies, India and the Caribbean. Both women may well have been involved with reform politics in the 1790s, but by 1815 Houseman, at least, had become decidedly non-partisan in her politics. By that time, however, both women were bent on directing their energies towards solving social ills and effecting moral and spiritual transformation, not political change. In a letter from Houseman to Coltman, possibly in reference to the radical past of Coltman's pastor, Robert Hall, Houseman argues that 'A minister's business is with the Gospel of Peace'.

'Christ and him crucified' is all that he should be determined to know; for when he begins to interfere with other matters, the glorious cause intrusted to him generally suffers loss. The Saviour's rich legacy, was 'My Peace I give unto you', and he intended the gift no doubt to be an entailed possession.⁹²

Given the volatile atmosphere surrounding Leicester, Lancaster and many of the northern industrial cities and villages between the time of the framework knitters' revolts in 1816–17 and the Peterloo Massacre in August 1819, it is not surprising that Houseman (Hall would have agreed with her by this time as well) would complain to Coltman, 'How lamentable, when his disciples alienate the hereditary treasure, and instead of faithfully conveying it, and diligently dispensing its blessings, cut off the entail, and stir up strife and discord!'⁹³

On 1 January 1812 Jane Houseman commenced a diary to be presented to her children upon her death, a promise she faithfully kept nearly twenty-five years later. This diary consisted of meditations composed by Houseman for each day of the year. Upon completion, she wrote:

God, in great mercy, has spared me to complete these daily portions. Here is what I may call the bread of life broken into 365 parts. By many of them I have often been strengthened and refreshed, and they still retain their nutritious and cheering qualities. They are like the manna which Moses laid up before the Lord which could not perish. My Omer is now filled; and I leave it to my children, that they may see and taste (when I have passed over Jordan) the food wherewith I have been sustained in the wilderness. They will find it composed of the incorruptible seed of the word; and, I can further add, laid up for them before the Lord in prayer, that those so dear to me may eat thereof and live for ever.⁹⁴

Jane Houseman died on 29 January 1837. On her deathbed she told her husband, 'I have had, through life a great and faithless fear of the act of dying; but it is gone now; there is nothing to dread.'⁹⁵ Her passing greatly affected her husband, however, and he survived her by only one year.

Jane Houseman's tract *Religion without Learning; or, The History of Susan Ward*, appeared sometime around 1817, not long after Coltman's first version of *Jenny Hickling*. Whether the two women challenged each other to write a piece for the Religious Tract Society is not known, but their works would be two of the most popular tracts of the society for the next two decades. *Susan Ward* was introduced to the Religious Tract Society by none other than Joseph Hughes, the society's secretary and the prominent Baptist minister at Battersea, London. The tract went through six editions in the first year alone, each issue between 2,000 and 5,000 copies, and twenty editions by 1820.⁹⁶ Jane Houseman would later say: 'Surely, surely what is so widely distributed, will produce *some* good. Should I be honoured with but *one* star in my crown, my joy would be great. But God must take *all the glory*.'⁹⁷ According to her husband's biographer, Robert Houseman

knew nothing of her writing the pamphlet or having it published; once he saw it, however, he immediately recognized himself as the minister and his wife as the writer, with the chief incidents of the plot a conflation of some of his experiences during his ministry at Langton in the late 1780s and early 1790s.⁹⁸

Susan Ward was a poor illiterate woman living in the parish of Langton, Leicestershire, her poverty aggravated by a complete lack of religious instruction throughout her life. In later years she became consumptive, and one day, while sitting near a sheepfold breathing in the air (it was thought beneficial to the lungs), a clergyman (Mr Houseman) saw her and began to talk to her about the state of her soul. Within a few months, though her health continued to deteriorate, her spiritual life blossomed, so that at death 'she entered on her glorious employment of praising her God and Saviour through a boundless eternity' (below, p. 330). The conversion narrative of the story is less than a quarter of the total tract. Jane Houseman uses Ward's deplorable state prior to conversion and the minister's desire to convert her as an object lessons for those without and within the Church, turning the remainder of the tract into a four-point sermon on the necessity of conversion (the depravity of the soul), the 'efficacious' means of conversion (the work of Christ on the cross), the visible evidence of conversion (a desire to evangelize) and the effectual evangelization of those outside the Church (her husband's seeking out the lowly and downcast Susan Ward). It is not surprising Houseman's tract enjoyed such immense popularity (her command of evangelical language and the harnessing of its emotive power would have rivalled many a Sunday sermon); nor is it surprising that she kept her gender hidden.

At the conclusion of the histories of *Mrs. Wilkins*, *Jenny Hickling* and *Susan Ward*, Mary Egerton Scott, Elizabeth Coltman and Jane Houseman all assume a typical pose of nineteenth-century authors of moral and religious tracts, one that effectively (and *affectively*) reached the intended audience through the appropriation of language common to the call to repentance in the evangelical sermon. Scott writes in *Mrs. Wilkins*,

A mere formal attendance on religious duties is a very different thing from *feeling* the life and power of religion in the soul ... Unless you are brought really to lead a life of daily repentance and faith, and are taught to take pleasure in serving and obeying God – do not deceive yourselves – you cannot be fit for the kingdom of heaven. Examine yourselves therefore, (as St. Paul says) whether ye be in the faith; and if you have hitherto been living a careless ungodly life – oh! do not any longer put off the great work of conversion; do not make any worldly concerns an excuse for neglecting your immortal soul. (below, p. 255)

'Reader', Coltman exhorts in *Jenny Hickling*,

What are the effects of God's dealings towards you? Do you know any thing of the saving grace of the Gospel? Have you ever been brought to a sense of your own vile-

ness and helplessness? Do you look to the same adorable Saviour? Do you depend upon him, and are you living to him? The Lord give you understanding in all things – And, that you may ‘obtain that which God has promised, may he make you to love that which he doth command.’ (below, p. 323)

Houseman observes:

If an *eternity* of misery is threatened to *every* transgressor, who does not repent and believe in Christ for salvation, how can it be imagined, that even the most severe sufferings, for the short term of threescore years and ten, can atone for your numberless transgressions of the Divine Law? If the rich, and those that are in circumstances of ease, will go away into *everlasting* punishment, provided they seek not to the Saviour for his great salvation, what an immense disproportion would there be, between *their* punishment and the punishment of those who have been poor or afflicted in this life only! The one banished from the presence of the Lord *for ever and ever*, the other only doomed to endure the ordinary sufferings of mortality *for a few years!* (below, pp. 334–5)

All three works utilize a narrator who espouses the virtues and necessity of morality, social propriety and evangelical Christianity by appropriating the voice of an androgynous preacher. In so doing, these works expand both the boundaries of the tract-sermon for women writers as a narrative genre and the accessibility of these tracts to an ever-increasing audience of semi-literate working-class children and adults (often these tracts were read aloud to those who could not read) around the world by means of the extensive distribution networks of the Religious Tract Society and the various missionary societies. Pamela J. Walker contends that by the nineteenth century, women had been marginalized within the traditional Protestant denominations ‘from anything other than suitably feminine activities such as fund-raising, teaching children or charitable work.’⁹⁹ The lives and the writings of the women included in these volumes, especially the three mentioned above and their work with religious tracts, belie that claim. Mitzi Myers is much closer to the truth when she asserts that these moral tracts ‘constitute a neglected female literary tradition – a woman writer’s distinctive brand of social fiction’. ‘In its complex mix of literary and cultural innovation’, she continues, these tracts illustrate ‘how women’s educative and caretaking role fed into new strains of social fiction’, exemplifying the ability of these writers to evade ‘cultural silencing’ by translating ‘female ideology’s didactic imperative into an authoritative voice capable of documenting and interpreting historical realities.’¹⁰⁰ If Jacqueline Pearson is correct when she argues that eighteenth-century novels ‘frequently labeled themselves histories or memoirs, and women like [Elizabeth] Hamilton or Sarah Fielding renegotiated their exclusion from history by writing pseudo-historical forms which allowed the incursion of feminized romance into masculine history’,¹⁰¹ in a similar way the women writers of moral fiction included in this volume, as well as Anne Steele, Mary Steele, Mary

Scott, Maria Grace Saffery, Anne Andrews Whitaker, Jane Attwater, Hannah Towgood and the other women presented in the remaining volumes in this edition, 'renegotiated' their exclusion from the pulpit through their brief didactic histories of women, their moral tales for children, their formal religious meditations, as well as their poems, letters and diaries. In so doing, they gained an 'authoritative voice' capable not only 'of documenting and interpreting historical realities', as Myers contends, but also of encapsulating their individual religious imperatives in a voice that spoke to all readers, male and female, young and old, through a medium that literally reached around the world by 1840.

TIMOTHY WHELAN

Notes

1. Quoted in D. Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790–1820* (London: Bibliographical Society, Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 2.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
3. Though his biographical information on Maria Grace Saffery is not entirely accurate, John Julian did note that in her youth she published both a poem and a romance novel, though neither was identified by Julian. He appears to be the only source to make mention of the novel, but how he came about that information is not known. See J. Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), pp. 986–7.
4. After the death of Mrs Andrews in 1791, Maria left Isleworth for Salisbury in late December of that year, ostensibly to spend time with her grandparents; the ultimate consequence, however, was her introduction to and eventual immersion (literally) into the Baptist church in Brown Street as a result of her friendship with John and Elizabeth Saffery.
5. Volume 6, letter 13.
6. Volume 6, letter 14.
7. Volume 6, letter 15.
8. Volume 6, letter 16.
9. Volume 6, letter 17.
10. Volume 6, letter 18.
11. Volume 6, letter 20.
12. Volume 6, letter 22.
13. Volume 6, letter 23.
14. Volume 6, letter 34.
15. *English Review*, 20 (1792), p. 308.
16. These copies can be found at Yale and the University of Pennsylvania.
17. *Catalogue of James Hammond's Circulating Library* (Newport, RI: Mason & Pratt, 1853), p. 47.
18. C. Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, 2 vols (Colchester: W. Keymer, 1785), vol. 2, pp. 77, 78, 83.
19. *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. W. McCarthy and E. Kraft (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1985), pp. 407, 411, 413.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 414.
21. Volume 6, letter 3.