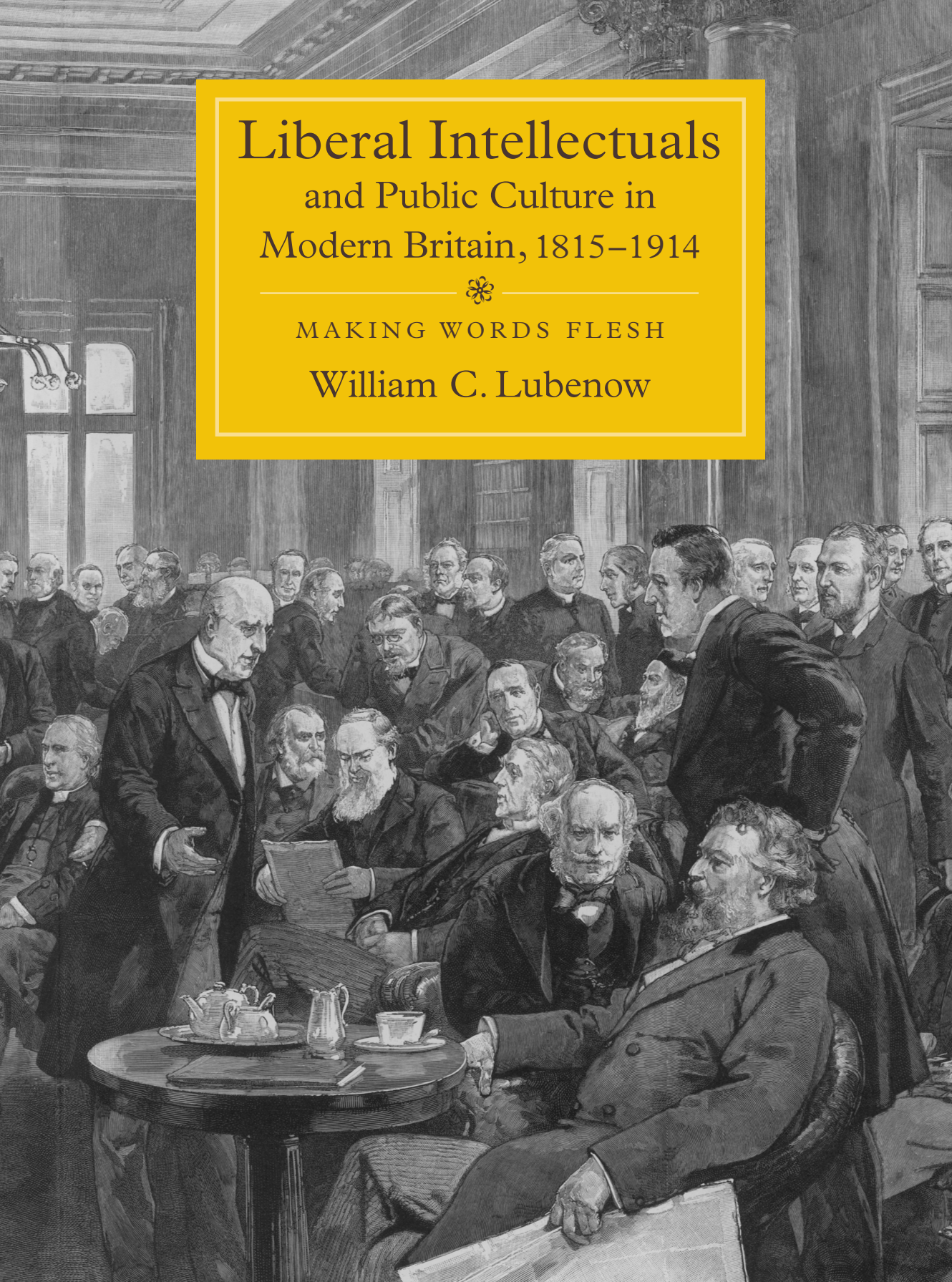# Liberal Intellectuals

## and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815–1914

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### MAKING WORDS FLESH

## William C. Lubenow

# Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815–1914

## Making Words Flesh

*Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain* shows how liberal values reconstructed public space in Britain after the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts [1828] and the passage of Catholic emancipation [1829].

It traces the century-long process against subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. It examines the emergence of the intellectual authority of the universities and the social authority of the professions. It shows how these changes gave different political and social opportunities for new families such as the Bensons, the Venns, the Stracheys and the Trevelyans. When the social moorings of the confessional state diminished new forms of association emerged to devise and promote liberal values as a distinctive form of cultural capital. This cultural capital – antique and modern letters, mathematics – filled the public sphere and provided the materials for intellectual change. Roman Catholicism and nationalism revealed fragilities of this public culture.

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# in Modern Britain, 1815–1914
## Making Words Flesh

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*In memory of*

John Lubenow
David Williams

*and for*

Cole Philpott
William Philpott

# Acknowledgements

# *Abbreviations*

AAW     Archbishops' Archives, Westminster
ACA     Arundel Castle Archives
BL      British Library
CUL     Cambridge University Library
GCCC    Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
HHH     Hatfield House, Hertfordshire
JRMB    James Ramsey Montagu Butler Papers (Trinity College,
        Cambridge)
KCC     King's College, Cambridge
MCC     Magdalene College Cambridge
NLS     National Library of Scotland
RI      Royal Institution
SOA     Society of Antiquaries
TCC     Trinity College, Cambridge

# Introduction

> The proceedings in Paris had this air of extraordinary impor-
> tance and unimportance at the same time. The decisions seemed
> charged with consequences to the future of human society; yet
> the air whispered that the word was not flesh, that it was futile,
> insignificant, of no effect, dissociated from events; and one felt
> most strongly the impression described by Tolstoy in *War and
> Peace* or by Hardy in *The Dynasts*, of events marching on to their
> fated conclusion uninfluenced and unaffected by the cerebrations
> of Statesmen in Council. John Maynard Keynes[1]

Liberal values reconstructed public space in Britain after the repeal of the
Test and Corporation Acts (1828) and the passage of Catholic emancipation
(1829). They were confident expressions of political and social experience.
These values were not subject to narrow definitions. As Bertrand Russell
said, 'the essence of the Liberal out-look lies not in what opinions are held
but in how they are held; instead of being held dogmatically, they are held
tentatively'.[2] These values created a vibrant governing temper in the long
nineteenth century. Yet, when Maynard Keynes wrote the mordant phrase
'the air whispered that the word was not flesh' on his return from the Paris
peace conference in 1919, he gave voice to the fear that liberal values were also
vulnerable. They had always been unstable, unsteady, and ambiguous. Even at
their philosophical foundation where Locke described human beings as free,
equal, and rational, it was clear that human freedom, equality, and rationality
allowed them to be malicious and mischievous.[3]

The 'intellectuals' in the title of this book are not necessarily those who
had intellectual occupations. Neither are they those in Britain who used the
authority gained from having some specialist knowledge to pronounce on
large moral questions.[4] These 'intellectuals' were those who, having university
educations, moved into the liberal professions. The founders of the British
Academy sought to define the dimensions of such a group when they tried to
determine how inclusive its initial fellowship ought to be. George Prothero,
the historian and editor of the *Quarterly Review*, held to a generous and

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[1]   John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York, 1920), p. 6.
[2]   Quoted in Ian Brunskill, (ed.), *Great Lives: A Century in Obituaries* (London, 2005),
p. 288.
[3]   Uday Singh Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke's Polit-
ical Thought* (Ithaca, New York, 1992), p. 1.
[4]   Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 52ff.

elastic view. Had Gladstone been alive, he wrote, 'it can hardly be doubted that he would have been on our first list, whatever may be the scientific value of his Homeric studies.'[5] The 'public' in the title of this book was not some sort of popular audience. This 'public' consisted of those who, in an age of a limited franchise, occupied positions between the academic world and journalism.[6] The 'values' to which the title refers, though they were conceptualized and contested, were not necessarily 'ideas'. They constituted a moral mindset which was instrumental, elastic, and plastic. These values added up to a series of processes in which criticism existed together with cultivation, analysis with intimacy, civilization with culture, fact with value, the desire for universal principles and the recognition of local truths, philosophy, and poetry. These were webs of mental and emotional impulses, restraints, reservations, reflexes, and reflections. They had no single direction or trajectory.

People of liberal values sought to identify those who had, in an age of a limited franchise, had the capacities for participation in public life.[7] Those capacities were a kind of property. Neither material nor tangible, this property was cultural and imaginative. Neither populist nor democratic, this imaginative property expressed a different kind of notability and respectability. Rosebery, an intellectual as well as a landed aristocrat, said he was liberal because he wanted to be 'associated with the best men in the best work'. Andrew Reid thought the 'first feature' of one who held liberal values was the 'love of his own conscience more than the approval of the conscience of the people', preferring 'the still small voice within him' to the 'shouts of the populace'.[8] These values can be found in the memorandums of civil servants, barristers' briefs, judges' decisions, parsons' sermons, as well as in Hansard. Alpinists, travellers, and teachers held them. The writing of biography, autobiography, and history were all efforts to give shape and order to divided experiences. This was, as George Watson has pointed out, 'the clearest and brightest instance in modern times of a political movement whose roots are literary'.[9]

Michael Walzer has shown how liberal values were 'parasitic' on older modes of thought, institutions, and communities. They freed people 'from religious and ethnic communities' but were tempered by older restraints and

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5    'Prothero Memorandum' [1901?], Bodleian Library, MS Bryce 230, f. 4.
6    Stefan Collini, *Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 2ff.
7    Alan Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Franchise* (Basingstoke, 2003), *passim*.
8    Rosebery's and Reid's statements are found in *Why I Am a Liberal: Definitions and Personal Confessions of Faith by the Best Minds of the Liberal Party*, collected by Andrew Reid (London [1890]), pp. 14, 114.
9    George Watson, *Politics and Literature in Modern Britain* (Totawa, New Jersey, 1977), p. 153.

loyalties.[10] Gladstone wrote to the Queen during the home rule crisis: '[i]n cherishing a love of liberty Mr Gladstone has always desired to cherish also his sympathy with antiquity'.[11] Edward August Freeman, the historian, wrote:

> I am a Liberal, a convert from hereditary Toryism because Toryism will not stand the test of English or any other history and Liberalism will ... Liberalism is in truth conservative of real antiquity; what calls itself conservative is conservative only of seeming antiquity, which is in truth very modern.[12]

Keynes felt the pull of the past also. Virginia Woolf described a dinner in 1934 where she, Keynes, and T S Eliot discussed Eliot's book *After Strange Gods*. Keynes said '"I begin to see that our generation – yours and mine V[irginia], owed a great deal to our fathers' religion. And the young, like Julian [Bell], who are brought up without it, will never get much out of life. They're trivial; like dogs in their lusts. We had the best of both liberation and order. We destroyed Xty & yet had its benefits."'[13] Liberal values expressed both liberty and order, which is one reason why Greek literature resonated so powerfully with them in the nineteenth century. They filled a newly turbulent space and imposed an order which was internally divided and dynamic.

Though there was no single point of origin for liberal values, they owed much to the Whig aristocracy, to Manchester markets, and to religious groups such as Unitarians, but this study takes the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the passage of Catholic emancipation as another source of the formation of liberal values. The abolition of religious tests signalled the beginning of the end of the political confessionalism which had marked the eighteenth-century fiscal military state. Chapter 1 of this book examines the century-long struggle against the Thirty-Nine Articles, which was a struggle about trust, loyalty, belonging, identity, and the need to devise different markers of authority. It also shows how, like liberal values themselves, religion became multiple and came to occupy different political and constitutional spaces. Liberal values were anti-clerical, but not irreligious, and they became lay and literary, subject to and formed by criticism.

Chapter 2 traces two themes: the emergence of intellectual authority in the universities and the emergence of social authority in the professions. It examines the way in which Oxford and Cambridge slowly detached themselves from dogmatic tests, adopted new courses of study, and opened themselves to a more diverse membership. These changes in the universities, in turn, promoted changes in the professions, transforming them from closed

[10]  Michael Walzer, 'Nervous Liberals', *New York Review of Books*, 26 (11 October 1977): 5–6.
[11]  Gladstone to the Queen, 6 March 1886, printed in Philip Guedalla (ed.), *The Queen and Mr. Gladstone, 1845–1898*, two volumes (London, 1933), II, p. 396.
[12]  Quoted in Reid (ed.), *Why I Am a Liberal*, pp. 47, 49
[13]  Virginia Woolf Diary, 19 April 1934: Anne Olivier Bell (ed.), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, volume 4* (New York, 1983), p. 208.

and corrupt bodies, riddled with patronage, into associations marked by merit. Professional people, now different kinds of gentlemen, were no longer identified by the physical markers of swiftness, strength, and military valour. Instead they were measured by their educations and their capacities for self-criticism.

Chapter 3 shows how these changes in the universities and professions gave opportunities for families such as the Bensons, the Furses, and the Venns to play different social and political roles. The members of these families could make claims for status based upon talent rather than on birth, land, or wealth. This chapter also shows how families with aristocratic connections, such as the Stracheys, the Trevelyans, the Lytteltons, the Sitwells, the Balfours, and even Curzon, could continue to play important roles in public life because they had adopted the liberal values of the universities and the professions.

Chapter 4 takes up the clubs and societies of the nineteenth century. With the social moorings and anchoring of the confessional-fiscal-military state diminished or gone, different forms of association emerged. Therefore, this chapter shows how such societies at the Dilettanti, THE CLUB, Nobody's Friends, Grillion's, and the Alpine Club, characterized by loosely-tethered and overlapping memberships, developed the devices of seriousness and conversation to restrain the anxieties and ambiguities of liberal values through the invisible hand of conviviality.

Chapter 5 examines the implications of these political and social changes for the ways in which liberal values emerged from the mental repertoires characteristic of the universities and the professions. As the careers of William Johnson, Oscar Browning, Walter Pater, and E M Foster show, antique letters, because of their imaginative power, could be mobilized to shape public school and university reform and to promote aesthetic change. Mathematics and statistics, as the careers of Babbage, Boole, and Clerk Maxwell show, were not merely descriptive attempts to identify order and regularity, they were also attempts to discover meaning. The philological revolution of the nineteenth century brought great authority to literary studies at the same time as it stripped letters of their representational claims. The abolition of dogmatic tests, therefore, was a political precondition for the abandonment of biblical literalism and opened the borderlands of letters for the opportunities and risks of exploration.

When Wellington and Peel brought in Catholic emancipation, as chapter 6 shows, they introduced two Trojan horses into British public life. One of these was Roman Catholicism itself. In the first half of the nineteenth century people holding to liberal values and Catholics collaborated to extend religious liberty. However, when Russell introduced the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill Catholics began to align themselves with the Conservatives. These relations remained unsettled because the Conservatives refused to support legislation Catholics favoured. Despite the efforts of some Catholics to breach

barriers between themselves and liberal values, robust assertions of Vatican authority in the nineteenth century put Catholics at odds with the processes and procedures of liberal values.

Chapter 7 takes up the second of Wellington's and Peel's Trojan horses: Irish nationalism. It examines two groups closely: those members of the Liberal party who became unionists and those liberals outside of Parliament who opposed nationalism. The received wisdom is that these liberal dissidents became Conservatives. Though a few did, as this chapter shows the largest number of unionist liberals drifted away from politics, discouraged by what they regarded as tarnished liberal values. This study concludes with some speculations about the role of liberal values in the twentieth century.

What follows ploughs these rich and fertile furrows. It fits an historiographical niche which complements rather than contradicts or contests the extensive body of existing scholarship on the history of liberalism and liberal values. A characteristic feature of liberal values was their capacity to express and negotiate divided and ruptured political, social, and mental terrain. Words became flesh in many forms: as party, as philosophy, as policy, even as property. As a considerable body of historical scholarship has shown, words became flesh in the Liberal party because it provided an organization to form and to promote liberal values.[14] Liberal values, however, extended beyond a single party. As to philosophy (perhaps one should better speak of 'philosophies') Isaiah Berlin has shown how 'human goals are many, and not all of them commensurable, and [how they are] in perpetual rivalry with each other'. To see some sort of general principle uniting these rival objectives 'is to throw a metaphysical blanket over either self-deceit or deliberate hypocrisy'.[15] Policy also expressed liberal values: toleration, retrenchment, franchise reform, and especially free trade.[16] Liberal values also expressed themselves materially, in property and possessions. Sir Robert Peel thought property and liberty were inextricably connected because liberty made it possible for people to 'apply themselves to the honest pursuit of industry'.[17] Mrs Humphrey Ward, in *Robert Elsmere*, described a liberal home with its walls hung with prints of Winchester and Worcester cathedrals and like-

[14]  Michael Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: Liberalism in Theory and Practice, 1868–1918* (London, 1987); G R Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration, 1886–1929* (London, 1992); T A Jenkins, *The Liberal Ascendancy, 1830–1886* (London, 1994); Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1993); Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of Liberalism, 1776–1988* (London, 1997).
[15]  Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969), p. 171.
[16]  Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of Liberalism*; Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment, Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992); Frank Trentman, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008).
[17]  Quoted in Peter Ghosh, 'Gladstone and Peel', in Peter Ghosh and Lawrence Goldman (eds), *Politics and Culture in Victoran Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 49.

nesses of Dante and Milton.[18] It was a way to make words very flesh, to translate them into tangible commodities and to locate them in space.[19] Patriotic national identity, a British constitutionalism standing in contrast to Napoleonic, Prussian, Romanov autocracy and papalism on the continent, also expressed liberal values.[20] The impulses of liberal values also manifested themselves in empire where, as one writer put it, there they 'found the concrete place of [their] dreams'.[21] Another prominent book describes the resilience and persistence of liberal values and shows how the home rule crisis between 1886 and 1894 'strengthened and expanded' their meaning.[22] Others have been more despondent, and, indeed, one has spoken of 'those of us who have always found the liberal mind a tissue of inhuman symmetries, a sacrifice of blood and bone to geometry'.[23] Another summarizes the state of play by saying 'liberalism in its hey-day remains a curiously ill understood phenomenon commonly viewed through the prism of liberal political theories of the present day'.[24]

*Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture* occupies its own place in the historiography of the nineteenth century. It shows how university and professional people in the nineteenth century formed liberal values and then used them to break the 'frost of custom' and to burst the 'chains of authority'.[25] According to John Stuart Mill 'ancient bonds no longer unite' and 'ancient boundaries would not long confine'. People would henceforth be held together 'by new ties' and would be 'separated by new barriers'.[26] *Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture* is about those new ties and barriers. This is a way of examining civil society in the nineteenth century, what Habermas called the public sphere and what Charles Taylor called the 'social imaginary'.[27] Civil society consisted

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[18]  Mrs Humphrey Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (Oxford, [1987]), p. 12.

[19]  Jordanna Bailkin, *The Culture of Property: The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago, 2004); 'The Place of Liberalism', *Victorian Studies*, 48 (1) (Autumn 2005): 83–90.

[20]  Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity, and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2006).

[21]  Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 36–7.

[22]  Eugenio F Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 2–3.

[23]  Michael Bentley, 'Review of Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*', in *Victorian Studies*, 43, (4) (Summer 2001): 620.

[24]  J S Jones, 'Review of Alan S Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*', *Journal of Modern History*, 78 (1) (March 2006): 180.

[25]  The phrases are Leonard T Hobhouse's in *Liberalism* (London, nd), p. 50.

[26]  John Stuart Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', in *Newspaper Writings*, A P Robson and R M Robson (eds.), *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto, 1986), XXII, p. 229.

[27]  Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Charles Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries', *Public Culture*, 14 (1) (2002): 91, 124 and *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), pp. 159–211. For Britain see Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003).

in shared assumptions, a common repertoire of behaviours, transformed traditions and newly invented ones. Liberal values sought a general order, but one, paradoxically, which was based on local preferences. Factual as well as normative, they enabled people to conduct the business of public life and to understand it as well.[28] In an interesting way, not only did words become flesh but flesh became words. Because groups are not cohesive and behaviour is multidimensional, liberal values required what one writer has called 'arenas of practice' where they could be 'acted and reenacted, learned and internalized'. They required 'rituals and institutions' for social mobility and for the reproduction of their practices and procedures.[29] As Michael Bentley has correctly pointed out, the notion of 'civil society' (or the 'public sphere' or 'social imaginary') has no 'substantive essence'. It is a phrase in 'a language of aspiration or imagination'.[30] Clifford Geertz has pointed out the difficulties of finding the 'middle term … [b]etween the stream of events that make up political life and the web of belief that comprises a culture'. He went on: '[w]hat joins such a chaos of incident to such a cosmos of sentiment is extremely obscure'.[31] In fact, liberal values joined incident to sentiment after the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the passage of Catholic emancipation. They constituted a multivalent sensibility which was 'ubiquitous yet strangely invisible'.[32]

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[28]  Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries': 105–11.

[29]  Daniel T. Rodgers, 'The Traditions of Liberalism', in Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon Schochet (eds.), *Questions of Tradition* (Toronto, 2004), p. 204.

[30]  Michael Bentley, 'Review of Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History*', *English Historical Review*, 122 (496) (April 2007): 501.

[31]  Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culltures: Selected Essays* (London, 1975), p. 311.

[32]  Daniel Wickberg, 'What is the History of Sensibilities?' *American Historical Review*, 112 (3) (June 2007): 667, 669–70.

# From Confessional Values to Liberal Values

> There have been three silent revolutions in England. 1. When the Professions fell off from the Church. 2. When Literature fell off from the Professions. 3. When the Press fell off from Literature.
>
> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 21 April 1832[1]

ON 13 April 1885 Gladstone wrote in his diary, 'Dined at Grillion's: alone'. He drank a bottle of champagne and wrote in the Club's minute book upon leaving:

> Among the faithless, faithful only be.

He added a passage from *Paradise Lost*:

> The mind is its own place, and in itself,
> Can make a heaven of hell, and a hell of heaven.[2]

Gladstone was in the concluding months of his second government. Wrestling with the crises of Khartoum and Afghanistan, with home rule, the Cloud in the West yet ahead, he meditated on faithfulness in isolation. Lord Houghton added some lines to the minute book commenting on Gladstone's 'wondrous brain' whose 'love-born faith' grew to 'over-faith' until 'reason and experience both grow blind' to the 'evil and unreason of mankind'.[3] Gladstone was always preoccupied with the relation between religion and politics. As a young man he wrote to James Hope Scott: '[t]he purpose of Parliamentary life resolves itself with me simply & wholly into one question – will it ever afford to means under God of rectifying the relations between Church and the State'.[4] In midlife he placed the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts

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[1]  *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring (Princeton, 1990), p. 285.
[2]  *Grillion's Club: A Chronicle, 1812–1913*, compiled by the Secretaries (Oxford, 1913), p. 95; *The Gladstone Diaries with Cabinet Minutes and Prime-Ministerial Correspondence*, ed. H C G Matthew (Oxford, 1990), volume 10, p. clxxii and volume 11, p. 322.
[3]  *Grillion's Club: A Chronicle, 1812–1913*, p. 96.
[4]  Gladstone to James Hope Scott, 20 August 1844, Gladstone Papers, B[ritish] L[ibrary], Add. Ms. 44217, f. 258.

and the passage of Catholic emancipation at the head of eight policies which he believed had 'destroyed' the constitution.[5] In 1888, meeting Mrs Humphrey Ward in Keble College, Oxford, he declared that he had yet two things to do in life: accomplish home rule and 'to prove the intimate connection between the Hebrew and Olympian revelations'.[6] Grillion's was a liberal space and Gladstone was the leading liberal. It was a fitting place and moment for him to ponder the limits of liberal values.

It is impossible to describe eighteenth-century Britain as a backward-looking, static *ancien régime*. A flood of modern research has revealed it as dynamic, enlightened, scientific, cosmopolitan, and as a world of affective individualism. Eighteenth-century Britain was also imperial, indebted, and animated by a military-fiscal apparatus of astonishingly baroque complexity.[7] Driven by war, its allegiances were confessional, not national, and it was stitched together by a tissue of patronage and clientage. Its confessional character is a feature of signal interest.[8] Whether the population attended the established church in great numbers or not, whether all observers held to the same dogmatic opinions or not, whether hierarchical authority was challenged or not, whether parsons held sway over their flocks or not are interesting questions, but they are less important than confessionalism's political hold in the eighteenth century.[9]

In the eighteenth century confessional loyalty was regarded as a natural condition. William Wilberforce could say, if a person 'is born in a Christian country, of course he is a Christian; if his father was a member of the Church of England, so is he'.[10] The established church was deeply involved in all aspects of political life. As one scholar has put it, 'the spiritual and temporal estates' were 'twin dimensions of an indivisible unity'.[11] The confidence and coherence of the Church of England increased in the early years of the reign of George II when earlier political loyalties diminished and the long wars

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[5]  John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, three volumes (London, 1903), II, p. 251.

[6]  Quoted in Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for Ghosts: Classical Influences in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1982), p. 125, n. 52.

[7]  John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); Philip Harling, *The Waning of the 'Old Corruption': The Politics of Economic Reform in Britain* (Oxford, 1996); G E Aylmer, 'From Office-Holding to Civil Service: The Genesis of the Modern Bureaucracy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 30 (1980): 91–108.

[8]  J C D Clark, *English Society, 1660–1832*, second edition (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 26–34 and *passim*. Clark's position has been sharply contested. See, for example, Joanna Innes, 'Jonathan Clark, Social History and England's "*Ancien Régime*"' *Past and Present*, 155 (1987): 165–200.

[9]  J C D Clark, 'England's *Ancien Régime* as a Confessional State', *Albion*, 21, (1989): 458.

[10]  Quoted in Clark, *English Society, 1660–1832*, p. 26.

[11]  G F A Best, *Temporal Pillars* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 70.

against France enhanced the power of confessional loyalties and, especially, its Protestant character.[12] For this reason it has been political historians, rather than social or cultural historians, who have stressed the importance of religion in the eighteenth century.[13]

The Test and Corporation Acts of 1673 and 1661 required those holding office to subscribe to Angelical principles and to take communion according to the formularies of the Church of England. However, for some time annual acts of indemnity had protected Dissenters from breaches of the law. Consequently, in time, there was little support for the Acts in either the church or the universities. No bishop voted against repeal and sixty-six Tories voted for repeal. As Lord John Russell argued, 'whatever Dissenters of the day might feel toward the House of Stuart, the Dissenters of the present feel nothing but loyalty to the House of Hanover'. He continued:

> For a long period these acts were maintained for fear of Driving the Church into the arms of the Jacobites; there is now no fear that the clergy will look for protection or favour through any other than the channel of his majesty's Treasury and Chancery.[14]

Not all were appeased or sanguine. 'The principles of Dissenters conscientiously opposed to the Church', Sir Robert Inglis, Bt, that excellent man of ultra-Toryism, said, 'can never give the same undivided allegiance to the constitution in Church and state which a churchman does.'[15]

Catholic emancipation in 1829 shocked the constitutional sensibilities of high churchmen who, on this issue, were joined by evangelicals. However, as early as 1818–1819 Peel had recognized that 'the Roman Catholic question could no longer remain what was called an open question'. The King's 'Confidential Servants' must be permitted to consider it 'on the same Principles on which they consider any question of Public Policy in the hope that some plan of adjustment can be proposed on the Authority and responsibility of a Government to command the assent of Parliament'.[16] In bringing in Catholic emancipation, Peel, and Wellington for that matter, were quite defensive in their short-run objectives. Daniel O'Connell's success in the Clare by-election of 1828 exposed the actual risks the government ran with a potentially treasonous Roman Catholic population in Ireland. Peel and Wellington were determined to protect established religion. As they realized,

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[12]  Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), pp. 11–54.
[13]  B W Young, 'Religious History and the Eighteenth-Century Historians', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2) (2000): 859.
[14]  The debate on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 26 February 1828, Hansard, new series, 18 (1828): 692.
[15]  Hansard, new series, 18 (1828): 714–15.
[16]  Memorandum on the Catholic Question, 1818–1819, Peel Papers, BL, Add. Ms. 40430, ff. 13–14, 30v–31.

in a vague sort of way, if Catholics and other dissenters were admitted to civil opportunities they were also admitted to civil responsibilities. Plurality could provide security if choice is chosen rather than coerced. Emancipation, therefore, was a political rather than a theological question. They did not kick the constitution into the long grass. They coupled emancipation with a bulwark of a strong state to control unstable elements. They disenfranchised the 40-shilling householder and subjected Ireland to what Peel called 'a vigorous unsparing enforcement of the law, criminal and civil'.[17] Additionally the Catholic emancipation act imposed strong prohibitions against the wearing of Roman Catholic vestments and the processing of the sacrament in public, provisions which would haunt the Liberal government in 1908.

Tories realized that, since a Tory government had brought in and passed the measure, they could not even trust their leaders.[18] Walter Farquhar Hook thought that with the repeal of the test acts 'the state *virtually* renounced any connection with religion'.[19] The Duke of Newcastle thought it produced 'liberalism, conciliation, and concession without limit'. As a result 'Jesuitical influence triumphed' and 'Revolution was forcibly established'.[20] Though he did not oppose the repeal of the test acts and though he brought it in, Peel regarded Catholic emancipation 'the severest blow which it has ever been my lot to experience'. As a result he lost his Oxford seat and his followers accused him of being a 'rat', 'Judas', 'apostate', and the 'murderer of the constitution'.[21]

The collapse of the confessional regime was, according to one of its historians, a 'redefinition of categories and a shift of values'.[22] These conceptual changes were not so much an attack on social power as they were a criticism of the inelasticities of state power. With the Jacobite threat over, with Dissent less of a threat to the Church of England than were the enthusiasm of Methodism and the austerities of the Enlightenment, and with the defeat of the French, Catholic emancipation passed into the sphere of practical politics. The catholic menace was lessened when the overwhelming Catholic majority in Ireland was diluted by incorporating it into the overwhelming Protestant majority of the United Kingdom through the Act of Union. The politics of nationalism, however, would make Catholicism a different kind

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[17] Quoted in Boyd Hilton, 'The Ripening of Robert Peel', in Michael Bentley, (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Cowling* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 74.
[18] G F A Best, 'The Protestant Constitution and its Supporters', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 8 (1958): 125–26.
[19] Hook to the Hon. and Rev. A P Perceval, 25 May 1831, printed in W R Stephens, *The Life of the Very Rev. W F Hook*, two volumes (London, 1878), I, p. 222.
[20] Duke of Newcastle, *Thoughts on Past Times, Tested by Subsequent Events* (London, 1837), pp. xix–xx.
[21] Hilton, 'The Ripening of Robert Peel', in Bentley (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine*, p. 63.
[22] Clark, *English Society, 1660–1832*, p. 25.

of threat. Lord Cornwallis, the Lord Lieutenant, summarized the paradox: 'We have united ourselves to a people whom we ought in policy to have destroyed.'[23] For the short term, therefore, the removal of civil disabilities for Dissenters and Roman Catholics became possible because state security could be provided without them and because their removal opened public service to a body of talent necessary for a civil society attempting to retrench itself from the debts and expenses of the preceding 100 years' war.

The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Catholic emancipation began a new era. It opened political and social space by forging liberal values, with new standards of personal austerity and probity, in a century-long struggle over subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. The protracted nature of the struggle was itself a feature of the formation of liberal values. It was a process which formed liberal values because it was a contest for trust and loyalty and, therefore, about belonging and identity. In the end it wrested Britain from the patronage values of the confessional-fiscal-military state and created a different regime of political, social, and moral identity.

The problem can be set out by the case of William Whewell. Whewell rose to the top of his slippery pole when he became Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, by subscribing to the formularies of the Church of England. Whewell, a man of many parts, was massive, one known for his feats of strength. A prize fighter once said to him, '[w]hat a man they lost when they made you a parson.'[24] It seems a curious thing to say, but it says something about liberal values. Liberal values were about free processes, about autonomy and independence. To take Holy Orders and to subscribe to confessional requirements made Whewell and clergymen with intellectual claims like his ( Julius Hare, Conop Thirwall, and Thomas Peacock, for example) dependent, less free, less manly indeed, not quite capable of courage, service, and action. Consequently, subscription became widely criticized.

John Mitchell Kemble, the pioneering Anglo-Saxon scholar, was an outsider in so many ways, and, consequently, became a sharp critic of subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. He did not think the university should be a forcing-house for Church of England clergymen. He wished to place 'the education of the higher classes on a broader, wider, and more general basis', and he called for the abolition 'of all religious tests, subscriptions and declarations, whatever, before taking degrees in [the] Arts, Law, or Medicine'. Kemble agreed with Coleridge about the importance of a clerisy set apart for the 'spiritual training of all classes of the population'. However,

[23] Lord Cornwallis to the Duke of Portland, 1 December 1800, quoted in Patrick M Geoghegan, 'The Catholics and the Union', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 10 (2000): 243.
[24] Quoted by Peter Searby in *A History of the University of Cambridge, Volume III, 1750–1866* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 445.

though this clerisy should be learned and religious, 'in orders they need not be, ought not to be'.[25]

Henry Sidgwick, Fellow of Trinity College and at the end of his career Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, set out forceful, yet complicated, criticisms of subscription when, finding it impossible to accept the Apostles' Creed, he resigned his fellowship. For Sidgwick, the ethics of conformity and subscription were a matter of honesty. Like his friend John Addington Symonds, honesty, for Sidgwick, was a defining feature of personal identity. What one believed, about ideas and about oneself, was a mirror into the self.[26] His age, he said, was one marked by free inquiry and large 'conscientious differences of opinion'. Great advances had been made 'toward civil and social equality of creeds'. Therefore religion itself would benefit if its leaders 'would abandon all idea of restricting inquiry and discussion and confine themselves entirely … to improving the method of inquiry, and elevating the manner of discussion'. In a world in which 'the divergence of religious beliefs, conscientiously held by educated persons, is great, is increasing, and shows no symptoms of diminution' the problem of subscription could be settled 'on the simple principles of ordinary morality'. Clergy and laity alike have 'only to refuse to say what [they do] not believe'.

> There is little doubt … that the existing Anglican services, compiled in the sixteenth century from mediaeval formulae of devotion, do not, in certain points, correspond to the convictions of even a majority of habitual worshippers in Anglican churches.

Honesty was the way forward: to 'get rid entirely of the sophistries and evasions which now, I think, do more than anything else to tarnish the clerical reputation'. What he called 'sophistries and evasions' extended even to the Apostles' Creed in which phrases like 'born of the Virgin Mary' and the 'Resurrection of the Body', he thought, were not held with anything like their literal meaning by 'the majority of even orthodox laity, and many of the clergy'.

> [I]f the actual state of opinion could be freely declared, and its consequences frankly faced[,] then we might fairly try what the spirit of compromise and conciliation, which, after all, is a virtue and not a vice of the Church of England, could [do] towards harmonizing the inevitable conditions of a national ministry with the inexorable demands of theological thought.[27]

[25] [John Mitchell Kemble], 'British and Foreign Universities: Cambridge', *British and Foreign Review*, 5 (July 1837): 168–209, at 206–07, 209.

[26] Bart Schultz, *Henry Sidgwick: Eye of the Universe, An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 384–442.

[27] Henry Sidgwick, *The Ethics of Conformity and Subscription* (London and Edinburgh, 1870), pp. 1–40 at 7, 10, 13, 15–16, 25, 30, 32–33, 39–40.

Exacting honesty would replace the fantasies of hollow harmony and hypocrisy.

Since confessional tests did not disappear immediately they continued to impose professional and intellectual costs on those who could not subscribe to them. F D Maurice did not take a Cambridge degree because his Unitarian upbringing would not tolerate the Trinitarianism of the Thirty-Nine Articles. William Bodham Donne also refused to subscribe and, though he went on to a literary career, always felt hindered as he tried to make his way in the world. C J Monro, a man of tremendous promise and a holder of a Trinity fellowship, could not take the MA degree because of persisting doctrinal requirements.[28] Monro's was not a solitary scandal. Between 1860 and 1889 nineteen Senior Wranglers were Dissenters and, though they could matriculate and take the BA degree, were ineligible for the MA.

Arthur Clough resigned his Oriel fellowship, Leslie Stephen resigned his at Trinity Hall, and Henry Sidgwick famously turned his back on Trinity. John Venn took advantage of the Clerical Disabilities Act to relinquish Holy Orders. These were telling moments. Yet some continued to obey the familiar formularies. Though normally scrupulous, T H Green crossed his fingers behind his back when he signed the Thirty-Nine Articles, saying 'one kiss does not make a marriage'.[29] Lord Rayleigh dutifully signed the Articles when he went to the Master's Lodge at Trinity, but he admitted that he was not fully aware of what he was doing.[30] It was not until 1873 that the Council of King's College, Cambridge, voted to abolish compulsory attendance at 'divinity lectures, tests & exams', and then, according to George Prothero, by a majority of only one vote.[31] Francis Cornford, the classical scholar and Fellow of Trinity College whose name is now known for his savage satire on academic politics,[32] as late as 1911 encouraged the undergraduates at Trinity to defy the college authorities and refuse to attend chapel. He urged them to free themselves 'from the burden of a discipline [which is] inconvenient and

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[28] Sir George Otto Trevelyan regarded Monro's translation of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' to Odyssean hexameters at Harrow as the most successful piece of Greek composition he had known. Trevelyan and other members of Mountstuart Grant Duff's Breakfast Club discussed problems of Greek composition on 5 July 1890. Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff, *Notes from a Diary, 1890–1891*, two volumes (London, 1901), II, p. 3.

[29] Archibald Henry Sayce, *Reminiscences* (London, 1922), p. 203.

[30] One of the older members of the college at that time, C W King, an authority on antique gems, had signed the Thirty-Nine Articles and took Holy Orders, but boldly declared that the Christianization of western Europe had been a 'wave of oriental superstition'. Robert John Strutt, 4th Baron Rayleigh, *The Life of John William Strutt, third Baron Rayleigh, OM, FRS*, an augmented edition (Madison, Milwaukee and London, 1968), p. 39.

[31] Prothero Diary, 5 February (Shrove Tuesday) 1873, K[ing's] C[ollege,] C[ambridge], Misc. 77/1/36.

[32] Gordon Johnson, *University Politics: F.M. Cornford's Cambridge and his Advice to the Young Academic Politician* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 85–110.

degrading'. By so doing they would 'strengthen the cause of religious liberty in the last stronghold of religious intolerance'.[33]

Though this hinge of British history did not swing open completely or at once, the repeal of the test acts and the passage of Catholic emancipation created new but different possibilities for the role of religion in civil society. In 1833 the government proposed to secularize a portion of the revenues of Irish bishoprics, to which Keble responded with his famous sermon 'National Apostasy'. In 1850 the judicial committee of the Privy Council declared that G C Gorman's views of the effectuality of baptism were not contrary to the doctrines of the Church of England. In 1862 the judicial committee overturned Canterbury's Court of Arches judgment against Rowland Williams's contribution to *Essays and Reviews* (1860) which had analysed Baron Bunsen's 'Biblical Researches'. Even as confessional tests passed, perhaps because they were passing, political, social, and economic discourse, even natural philosophy, religious thought, now released from constitutional fetters, shaped political, social, economic discourse and even discussions of natural philosophy.[34] Religion might now be captured by denominational or communal bigotries, but at least it had been liberated from constitutional bigotries. Displaced from constitutional politics, religion was replaced in a different position in the public sphere. Religion became lay and to some extent anti-clerical and multiple. Anti-clerical protests in Britain, unlike their French counterparts, were neither Voltarian protests against a church allied with an authoritarian monarchy, nor protests against a church intent on regulating moral and social life.[35] As in other countries, the contest over religious ideas in Britain was a 'war without boundaries'.[36] It is important, therefore, to explore the effect emerging liberal values had upon religion in nineteenth-century civil society.

In 1868 Fenton Hort, an Alpinist and member of the Committee to Revise the New Testament and much else, writing from his parish, St Ippolyts in Hertfordshire, put forward what seems to be an Anglican theory of secularism. He wrote to J B Lightfoot, the Hulsean Professor of Divinity at

[33] F M Cornford, *Religion in the University* (Cambridge, 1911), pp. 2–3, 5–6.
[34] Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford, 1988) and 'The Politics of Anatomy and the Anatomy of Politics', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whitmore, and Brian Young (eds), *History, Religion, and Culture, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 179–97.
[35] Sudhir Nazareeshigh, 'Religion and Politics in the St. Napoleon Festival, 1852–1870: Anti-Clericalism, Local Patriotism, and Modernity', *English Historical Review*, 119 (482) (June 2004): 618–19 and *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, 1998); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Modernity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995); Ruth Harris, 'The Unconscious and Catholicism in France', *Historical Journal*, 47 (2) (2004): 331–34.
[36] The phrase is Martin Papenheim's in '*Roma o Morte* Culture Wars in Italy', in Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (eds), *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 217.

Cambridge, 'I have come to the conclusion that the College as well as the University must be thrown open.' He was, he said, 'not at all insensible to the immediate evil and the future danger of the change, but I am hopeful about their being surmounted'. He continued:

> If we are wise now, I think we may keep our position as the *standard* 'denomination' though not the *exclusive* one: and if so, the most important parts of the religious machinery may be preserved, and I believe neither Church nor religion will suffer in the long run.[37]

For Hort religion (and secularism) was becoming multiple. Freed from confessional commitments, religion could become, though more fluid and personal, intellectually respectable.

These shiftings and slidings of religious experience can be illustrated by the Stephen family. Sir James Stephen, the undersecretary for the Colonial Office who became Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, had published some essays which expressed reservations about the doctrine of eternal damnation. These were sufficiently pronounced that when he arrived to take up his chair George Corrie, the Master of Jesus College (the man who put the railway station so far from the colleges it would discourage young men from using it), remarked: 'who would have thought we should live to see a living Gnostic walking about the streets of Cambridge. You know … in healthier times he would have been burnt'.[38] Yet Stephen always spoke of Christ as 'the Master'.[39] When his son James Fitzjames Stephen contemplated taking Holy Orders he explained his reluctance to his father by saying 'it involved the wearing of mental chains'. His father responded: 'we all have to wear chains'. Some years later Fitzjames Stephen asked his father if 'he really believed the whole of the Bible to be true'. The elder Stephen responded by saying that no doubt there were 'mistakes arriving from corrupt reading & so forth'. Dissatisfied, the young Stephen persisted and asked his father if 'he thought it all substantially true'. Stephen did not recall his father's exact answer but said, 'I know that he appeared much pained & embarrassed & said, "Well, well, my dear boy—perhaps it is as you say—but don't tell your mother and sister"'. Stephen felt his father was unwilling to confront such subjects but, in time, came to understand his reticence. Still, he wished his

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[37] Hort to Lightfoot, 16 March 1868, printed in Arthur Fenton Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, two volumes (London, 1896), II, pp. 94–95.
[38] M Holroyd, *Memorials of the Life of G.F. Corrie, D.D.* (Cambridge, 1890), p. 277. Holroyd puts down Corrie's remark to his 'dry sense' of humour.
[39] '… with a sort of pathetic accent of the "a"'. James Fitzjames Stephen to Lady Grant Duff, 13 December 1884, Stephen Papers, C[ambridge] U[niversity] L[ibrary], Add. 7349/13/56–57.

father 'had been bolder and more decisive'.[40] An inner voice, 'very deep down', warned Fitzjames Stephen against taking Holy Orders. 'Like so many such voices,' he wrote, 'it gave no reasons.' Stephen 'determined to try the question thoroughly', thought the thing out and wrote a remarkable document evaluating his professional choices. He read it over at intervals, adding notes and comments.[41] He was almost as reticent as his father in expressing his religious views to his children. He attended family prayers, but his wife read them. He accompanied his family to religious services, but he did not participate, nor did he allow his children to take the sacrament. He told them that they must believe in God and in a 'future state', but he also told them 'that a good deal of what they heard in church and read in the Bible was not true'.[42]

Fitzjames Stephen left an 'unfinished letter to his children' which attempted to explain his behaviour. Changes in his thoughts on religion, he said, caused him 'to observe an unusual degree of reserve to you all on these matters'. Realizing this would perplex them, he went on to describe the ways in which knowledge was limited.

> All our opinions, upon all subjects whatever, including those matters which we directly perceive at any given moment, assume certain things of which we have not & cannot possibly have any proof at all…. Knowledge is an attribute of human nature whereby we are able, to a certain extent, to be at distant places, & in past or future times, although the nature of things confines us to one portion of space at each successive moment in time.[43]

As these revealing remarks suggest, Stephen was not hopeless. Imagination remained. It was impossible to have knowledge about God or of a 'future', but it was also 'impossible not to form some sort of conjecture about both'.[44]

And conjecture he did. Stephen summarized his view of the state of religion and the new opportunities for different varieties of religious experience.

> For me Christian religion in its present state is like a landscape which one has always seen from one point of view, & at one particular time of day. The point of view has changed, the time of day altered, any number of new objects have

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[40] The quotations in this paragraph are taken from James Fitzjames Stephen, 'Autobiography', Stephen Papers, CUL, Add. 7349/19/7/47–48.

[41] James Fitzjames Stephen, 'Choice of One of the Three Learned Professions, Law, Physic, & Divinity undertaken by J F Stephen—June 10, 1850', Stephen Papers, CUL, Add. 7349/16.

[42] Fitzjames Stephen to Lady Grant Duff, 1 [?] 1875, Stephen Papers, CUL, Add/7349/13/3.

[43] James Fitzjames Stephen, 'An Unfinished Letter to His Children', [written after 1872 but before 1876], Stephen Papers, CUL, Add. 7349, c. 21.

[44] James Fitzjames Stephen to Lord Lytton, 24 June 1876, Stephen Papers, CUL, 7349/14/1/17.