

THE VICTORIAN WORLD

With an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses political history, the history of ideas, cultural history and art history, *The Victorian World* offers a sweeping survey of the world in the nineteenth century.

This volume offers a fresh evaluation of Britain and its global presence in the years from the 1830s to the 1900s. It brings together scholars from history, literary studies, art history, historical geography, historical sociology, criminology, economics and the history of law, to explore more than 40 themes central to an understanding of the nature of Victorian society and culture, both in Britain and in the rest of the world. Organised around six core themes – the world order, economy and society, politics, knowledge and belief, and culture – *The Victorian World* offers thematic essays that consider the interplay of domestic and global dynamics in the formation of Victorian orthodoxies. A further section on ‘Varieties of Victorianism’ offers considerations of the production and reproduction of external versions of Victorian culture in India, Africa, the United States, the settler colonies and Latin America. These thematic essays are supplemented by a substantial introductory chapter, which offers a challenging alternative to traditional interpretations of the chronology and periodisation of the Victorian years.

Lavishly illustrated, vivid and accessible, this volume is invaluable reading for all students and scholars of the nineteenth century.

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THE VICTORIAN WORLD



Edited by

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First published 2012
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

The Victorian world/edited by Martin Hewitt.

p. cm. – (The Routledge worlds)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Great Britain – History – Victoria, 1837–1901. 2. Great Britain –
Intellectual life – 19th century. 3. Great Britain – Politics and government –
19th century. 4. Great Britain – Social conditions – 19th century.
5. Great Britain – Colonies – History – 19th century. I. Hewitt, Martin.

DA550.V5447 2012

941.081 – dc23

2011040320

ISBN: 978-0-415-49187-7 (hbk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The editor wishes to thank all those who have helped directly and indirectly to support the preparation of this volume, in particular Ann Holmes and Sharon Handley, Deans of Humanities, Law and Social Sciences, and colleagues in the Department of History, and latterly in the Department of History, Politics and Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Thanks are also due to the contributors to this volume. Editing a multi-author volume of this kind is never without its tribulations, especially when taken on single-handed, and I'm grateful for the support received from the contributors, both in keeping (by and large) to the deadlines set, and in making allowances for the inevitable inefficiencies in the editorial process.

Thanks are also due to the editorial team at Routledge, in particular Laura Mothersole, who has coped admirably with the vagaries of editorial response to her various queries and requests, and in particular taken on the burden of drawing together the illustrations for the volume.

Illustrations are produced with grateful thanks to the National Museums Liverpool, US Senate Collection, History South Australia, Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Government Art Collection, London, *Punch, Illustrated London News*, The British Library, Leeds Library and Information Services, the Royal Academy, Bridgeman Art Library, Alamy, Corbis, Mary Evans Picture Library, the Barnardos Archive, National Portrait Gallery, London, Manchester City Art Galleries and Marshall Library of Economics, University of Cambridge.

PREFACE

The notion of the 'Victorian world' as addressed by this volume is perhaps more ambivalent than most of the 'worlds' examined in the Routledge 'Worlds' series. The essays offered here, individually and severally, seek to work within this ambivalence, to respond on the one hand to an increasing sensitivity both to the imperial dimension of domestic culture of Britain and Ireland visible in the scholarship of the last decade, a new determination to see the imperial dynamics of the experience of Victorian Britain, and on the other to the new attentiveness to the dynamics and effects of globalisation.

The essays also acknowledge that the idea of 'Victorian' is itself a concept freighted with contested meanings and usages. For half a century 'Victorian studies' has been a recognisable field of interdisciplinary scholarship, equipped with the full panoply of academic endeavour, journals, associations, centres, bibliographies and chairs. And yet scholars have persisted in treating the designation with embarrassment, if not disdain, disputing the utility and validity of the chronological boundaries so signified, and contesting the coherence and consistency of the characteristics ascribed. The contributors to *The Victorian World* have not, in taking on their assignments, committed themselves to any particular stance in relation to these debates, other than a willingness to explore aspects of a 'Victorian' experience, the usefulness of designations of Victorian or Victorianism, and the productiveness of multidisciplinary approaches to these questions.

The volume has been structured around a series of themes and then specific topics designed to offer a broad multidisciplinary approach to its subject. Authors were given broad latitude in the particular approach to the topic they took on. The first section, which looks at Britain and the world order, and the last section, which attempts to consider the extent to which 'Victorian' and 'Victorianism' are useful concepts for understanding the cultures of British colonies of various sorts, the 'informal empire' and also the United States, by necessity adopt international perspectives. The essays in the remaining sections, on economy and society, politics, knowledge and belief, and culture, offer discussions more particularly centred on the experiences of Britain, although all the authors have been encouraged to explore the global dimensions and connections of their discussions.

It is hoped that cumulatively, the essays transcend the inevitable limits of their individual parts, together offering fresh insight into the character, conventions and contradictions of Victorian Britain and its wider world.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Victorian milestones



Martin Hewitt

On 22 January 1901 Queen Victoria died. The nation mourned the end of a period in the history of Britain and the world. ‘The queen is dead . . . and the great Victorian age is at an end . . . It will mean great changes in the world’ wrote one contemporary diarist (Wilfred Scawen Blunt, quoted in Smith 1964: v); ‘it was as if an essential wheel from the machine of the Empire, and indeed of the world, had slipped from its spindle’ commented E. F. Benson (1930: 336). In sombre tones, editorials in newspapers around the world lamented the Queen’s passing. Publishers rushed to issue nostalgic biographies and surveys of the reign. At a meeting at 10 Downing Street in May the Victoria League was founded to preserve the ideals the Queen was taken to stand for by promoting the idea of empire. A flurry of activity saw statues of Victoria take a prominent place in the public realm of towns and cities across the empire. Not all responses were uncritical (George Bernard Shaw denounced the Queen’s ten-day lying-in state as ‘insanitary’, recommending that she be quickly cremated or given a shallow burial in a perishable coffin [Holroyd 1989: 58]), but throughout the first half of the twentieth century autobiographers and novelists constructed the Queen’s death and state funeral as a moment of crisis and caesura in the narrative of British history. In the *Forsyte Saga* John Galsworthy conjured the response of the watching crowds: ‘a murmuring groan from all the long line of those who watched. . . so unconscious, so primitive, deep and wild . . . Tribute of an age to its own death. . . The Queen was dead, and the air of the greatest city upon earth grey with unshed tears.’ Even his worldly hero Soames saw the event as ‘supremely symbolical, this summing-up of a long rich period’ (Galsworthy 1922: 512, 518).

Although C. F. G. Masterman, in the preface of his *The Heart of Empire*, noted that even before the Queen’s death, ‘the forces characteristic of that period had become expended, and that new problems were arising with a new age’ (1901: v), the sense of sudden release was palpable. H. G. Wells compared the Queen to ‘a giant paperweight that for half a century sat upon men’s minds’ (Webb 1983: 3). ‘A restraining influence had been removed, which was none the less oppressive because it was largely an affair of sentimental imagination’, one later recollection more temperately suggested (Kellett 1936: 90–91). Such verdicts followed, if they

also subverted, a path already well established, not least in the enthusiastic and inevitably uncritical paeans that marked the celebrations of Victoria's Golden and Diamond Jubilees in 1887 and 1897. For all her periods of public disengagement, her narrow range of experience, her prejudices and political partisanship, Victorian culture celebrated to itself a Queen who, in the popular Tennysonian concept, 'wrought her people lasting good' (Ellis 1932: 740). It was no accident that Lytton Strachey's Bloomsbury counterblast against the Victorians singled out the Queen as an object for his corrosive invective.

Three tropes emerge powerfully from the responses to the Queen's death: a belief that the reign of Queen Victoria constituted a distinct historical period, a recognition that the Queen was herself an active force in this distinctiveness, and the extent to which this was a global and not merely national, or even imperial, agency. Over the course of the twentieth century all three judgements have been treated in many quarters with scepticism, if not disdain. Historians and literary scholars tend to be suspicious of any periodisation, a position strengthened in recent years by the turn away from master narratives and the search for plurality and complexity. But there has been an especially powerful prejudice against the Victorian as period, perhaps in part because of this sense of monarchical agency. John Lucas, for example, has suggested that 'There is a strong case for arguing that, except in the most rigorously controlled of contexts, "Victorian" and "Victorianism" are terms we could well do without. They are all too frequently employed in ways that are chronologically indefensible, historically dubious, intellectually confusing, and ideologically unacceptable' (Lucas 2000: 29). Griselda Pollock has warned of the 'gendered disability' that the 'female naming' of 'Victorian' imposes, making it 'susceptible to the easy narrative, the anecdotal, the immediate, the decorative, the sentimental, the brightly-coloured and showy, the eclectic' (Pollock 1993–94: 599). It is a feature of Victorian studies that scholars who identify to a greater or less extent with the field often do so without enthusiasm for the periodisation it implies.

Paradoxically, while unease with Victorian periodisation has flourished, so has recognition of the significance of Victoria in her imperial role. Recent scholarship has affirmed that claims for the importance of Victoria were not simply the product of an unsavoury cultural dependence. John Plunkett has explored the extent to which 'Victoria inhabited her subjects' lives to an extraordinary degree' (Plunkett 2003: 2). This was not merely a question of the pervasive material presence of Victorian iconography: Staffordshire pottery figurines, Victoria parks, halls, baths, hotels, hospitals, universities, stations, even insurance companies, V. R. insignia on postboxes, mayoral chains of office. It was a reflection to the extent to which, notwithstanding her withdrawal after the death of Albert, Victoria was assiduous in her public role, an assiduousness that brought engagement with insight and firmness with important issues of foreign policy, and a general oversight over all elements of government. Opinionated, forthright, stubborn, at times she was writing to Disraeli three or four times a day (Hardie 1935). Significantly, republicanism obtained little purchase within nineteenth-century radicalism, which participated without any great unease in the ceremonial of the loyal subject. As David Cannadine has noted: 'the British Empire was a *royal* empire, presided over and unified by a sovereign of global amplitude and semi-divine fullness' (Cannadine 2001: 102). Victoria's name 'was literally *everywhere*', in the names of lakes and rivers, towns

and cities. Her statue, ‘often in canopied magnificence’ gazed down from Vancouver to Valetta, from Cairo to Canberra. The *Daily Graphic* summed up the 1897 Diamond Jubilee celebrations as ‘the survey of the Sixty Years Reign and of the microcosm of Empire with which we have filled our streets’ (Judd 1996: 132).

The Jubilee celebrations of 1887 and 1897 played a significant role in cementing understandings of the association of Queen with a distinct historical period. In both years the market was flooded with general surveys of the reign, such as T. H. Ward’s *The Reign of Victoria: Fifty Years of Progress* (1887) and T. H. S. Escott’s *Social Transformations of the Victorian Age* (1897). As the titles of many of these texts indicate, despite the accusation of later scholars that, in the words of Lucas, “‘Victorian’ in particular is used to imply a cultural and political homogeneity which, the evidence suggests, never existed” (Lucas 2000: 29), the contemporary conviction that the Queen’s reign marked a distinct period in British history implied no stability except the consistency of overwhelmingly beneficial transformation. For the Victorians their age was ‘an age of revolution’ (for example Dowden 1888: 159). The celebrations of the period that poured from the press in 1887 and 1897 were united in their sense of the distance travelled since the 1830s. In his response to Tennyson’s gloomy “Locksley Hall Sixty Years After”, for example, Gladstone offered a vigorous defence of the Victorian record. The evils that Tennyson bemoaned might exist, but their prevalence had been greatly reduced: education had been provided, wages increased, philanthropic activity was providing model dwellings, the demoralising abuses of the Poor Law had been swept away, class legislation like the Game Laws repealed, the iniquities of barriers to trade banished, England had led the world in the establishment of cheap communications, religious disabilities removed, the administration reformed, the country’s trade increased fivefold, the manners of the people and their popular pastimes improved (Gladstone 1887). It is this sort of almost forced optimism that Gissing’s Mr Barmby lampooned in *In the Year of Jubilee*: ‘to celebrate the completion of fifty years of Progress. . . . Only think what has been done in this half century; only think of it! Compare England now, compare the world with what it was in 1837. It takes away one’s breath!’ (Gissing 1887: 35).

Historians have also questioned the efficacy of the ‘Victorian’ as period by challenging its internal coherence and terminal dates. In the historiography of the first half of the twentieth century, the dominant categories were ‘early’ and ‘late Victorian’, with the break falling conveniently just about halfway through the reign. R. C. K. Ensor, in his volume of the *Oxford History of England* proceeded confidently from the predicate that ‘round about 1870 occurs a watershed in English life’ (Ensor 1936: 136). G. M. Young, the most influential twentieth-century interpreter of the Victorians, adopted this frame in his *Early Victorian England*. Significantly, however, Young’s own introductory essay to this volume furnished the bulk of the material for his *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (1936), which treated the post-1870 period as something of an addendum. In the second half of the century this chronological narrowing became a common feature of interpretations of the Victorian. Walter Houghton’s immensely influential *Victorian Frame of Mind* covered only 1830–70. Thereafter it became commonplace, especially of literary and cultural studies, to conceive of some core nineteenth-century period (most commonly the 50 years from 1830 to 1880) as Victorian, consigning

the later years to a (usually ill-defined) transitional or ‘post-Victorian’ period; the approach most recently taken by Philip Davis’ volume on *The Victorians* in the *Oxford English Literary History*. During the 1950s the binary divide was generally superseded by the adoption of a three-way division of early, middle and late, which followed a number of works, in particular W. L. Burn’s *An Age of Equipoise*, which in effect divided the pre-1870 period into ‘early’ and ‘mid-’ Victorian periods, although on occasions the mid-Victorian was pushed into the 1870s. Indeed in recent years the 1870s and early 1880s have become contested terrain, often loosely assimilated into the mid Victorian.

This introductory chapter attempts to provide a sense of the internal structure of the Victorian period, to evaluate the appropriateness of its sub-periodisations; to consider its transitional moments and specific milestones. How far did the beginning and end of Victoria’s reign mark significant watersheds in the history of Britain and her global presence? What was the nature of the transformations effected? To what extent did the intervening period share common characteristics? What were the key moments of change within the period, and what sort of internal periodisation do they create? G. M. Young once recommended the study of a single year as a way to understanding crucial phases of crisis and reorientation, and there are a number of Victorian examples, studies of 1837, 1848, 1850, 1859, 1867, 1884 and 1900. In the discussion that follows most of these years will figure prominently, but usually as part of more extended periods of change. As Carl Dawson has acknowledged, historical processes ‘sprawl in time’ and calendar years are rarely satisfactory (Dawson 1979: xi). The discussion that follows suggests that all these years, with the partial exception of 1859, can be placed within watersheds that help structure the Victorian period, not into the traditional binary or tripartite divisions, but into four distinct phases.

ENTERING THE VICTORIAN AGE

The year 1837 is not a very promising candidate as the threshold of a new era. Richard Stein’s study *Victoria’s Year. English Literature and Culture, 1837–1838* demonstrates the presence of many straws in the wind of change, but no coherent or substantial sense of the year as a critical moment. Like many of the hinge years of the period, 1837 was a year of economic bust. Perhaps in part for this reason, Victoria’s accession less than a month after her eighteenth birthday was celebrated in street ballad and periodical squib alike as offering the promise of a new start, a break with Hanover, a ‘spring-like reign’ as Laetitia Landon mused (quoted in Plunkett 2003: 18). The new reign necessitated a general election, which brought one Benjamin Disraeli to the Commons, as well as confirming the growing importance of middle-class radicalism and tightening the screw of party. The Great Western, the biggest ship in the world, was launched on 19 July 1837 (although it did not make its first successful crossing of the Atlantic until April 1838). Captain Alexander Burnes arrived in Kabul to attempt to enter into commercial relations with the ruler, beginning the ‘great game’ in Central Asia. There were rebellions in Canada, while at home a parliamentary enquiry into relations with aboriginal peoples in British settlements was noting that ‘the situation of Great Britain brings her beyond any other power into communication with the uncivilised nations of

the earth' (quoted Darwin 2009: 27). John Pringle Nichol's *Views of the Architecture of the Heavens* offered an important early statement of the evolutionary history of the world and the galaxy. Legal reforms abolished the pillory as a punishment, and severely curtailed the scope of the death penalty. A meeting at the British Coffee House, sponsored by the London Working Men's Association, effectively launched the campaign for the People's Charter. But portentous as all this might have been, it cannot be said to constitute a move from one era to another.

Nevertheless, in hindsight it is possible to see 1837 as coming towards the end of a number of years of far-reaching reformation, which taken together do – even if largely as a matter of happenstance – constitute a fundamental historical transformation. These changes were innumerable and wide-ranging (Schlicke 2005). Some can be traced to a particular event or instance, though most involved processes of social and cultural modification that unfolded over time. The pace of change was not uniform, although in many cases, as contemporaries remarked, it was remarkably rapid. Sir James Mackintosh, the Whig law reformer, commented that in comparing the decades before 1830 to those immediately after it was as if he had 'lived in two different countries and conversed with people who spoke different languages' (quoted in Lester 1995: 40).

The year 1832 is a much better candidate for the opening of the period that was to be named Victorian. Reform agitation and the Swing Riots generated a profound sense of crisis. Admittedly, when it finally emerged, the 1832 Reform Act (and its Scottish equivalent) was a conservative measure, which increased the electorate to only about 20 per cent of the population, and left the new industrial areas very much underrepresented, and the landed elite still dominant. This said, the transformation was still profound, sweeping away key elements of the ancient constitution, and setting a pattern that survived until the final years of Victoria's reign. Several important recent studies have re-established the extent to which the various reform measures of these years 'unleashed a wave of political modernisation' and 'could scarcely have caused a more drastic alteration in England's political fabric' (Phillips and Wetherell 1995: 412, 416). The significance of the developments of the 1830s lies less in the political arithmetic of enfranchisement or even the algebra of party development, than in the emotional and intellectual responses they elicited. Suddenly, the years of Lord Liverpool seemed the remote politics of the past. Many constituencies in Scotland and Wales were transformed from tiny closely managed fiefdoms to larger electorates with a genuine political voice. There was a fundamental broadening of the political nation, especially in the way that the redistribution of seats helped to place the practices and rituals of participative politics at the centre of the public culture of the expanding towns and cities. Hanoverian 'virtual representation' was replaced by a franchise based on universal judgements of individual capacity. The 1832 settlement established that the right adjustment of the franchise was a function of personal fitness rather than systemic exigencies, and ensured that for the next 80 years debates over the nature and claims of citizenship would remain at the heart of politics. At the same time, a new 'two-party polarity was created with remarkable suddenness' (Clark 1985: 410). The terms 'Conservative' and 'Liberal' came into common usage for the first time in the decade after 1827, and voting patterns on party lines hardened dramatically in

parliament and in the constituencies (Rohan McWilliam's essay in this volume offers an alternative discussion of the place of party in Victorian politics, but not one that is in fundamental dispute with the argument here).

This redistribution of political power was part of a much wider transformation of cultural geographies occurring in the 1830s, symbolised above all by 'culture-shaking improvement in communication' (Robson 1976: 80). The decade brought not just the railways and steamships but paper-making machinery and the rotary steam press, the reformed postal service, wood-cut illustrations and photography, and cable telegraphy. These technologies, and the meanings ascribed to them by contemporaries amazed and sometimes bewildered at the pace and scale of change, helped reorder the landscape, transform personal relationships and reconfigure Britain's global presence. At the heart of this transformation were the railways. Conventionally the railway age commenced with the opening of the Liverpool to Manchester railway in 1830, although it was not the first railway, or even the first to carry passengers. In 1835 the *Quarterly Review* was still describing as 'palpably ridiculous ... the prospect held out of locomotives travelling twice as fast as stagecoaches' (quoted in Sanders 1999: 63). Yet within a few short years stagecoaches were already being treated as a symbol of the past. From 1839 to 1841 the nucleus of a national network was established. Steam propulsion on land encouraged steam propulsion on water. Like railways, steamships first began to appear several decades before the accession of Victoria; but here too the 1830s were years of rapid development, stimulated by government mail contracts and by the railways. Steam metaphors became inescapable, and in two memorable images, *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839), an elegy on the fate of one of Nelson's most famous ships made obsolete by the new steam frigates, and *Rail, Steam, Speed* (1844), a meditation on the disruptive force of the railway locomotive and its tracks in the English countryside, J. M. W. Turner marked Britain's passage into a new age of steam. Driven by the greater access railways offered publishers to national markets, and the partial removal of restrictions of the stamp duties, the 1830s also saw the occasionally belated application of a number of technological developments in printing and publishing: the production of paper from rags, new methods of type-setting such as stereotyping, and the exploitation of the first steam printing presses. The result was what one literary historian has described as 'the great literary watershed of the years 1830–36' (James 1974: 83). The popular monthlies and weeklies so characteristic of Victorian periodical publishing flooded onto the market in the years after 1832 and the launch of Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine* and *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*.

At the same time Britain's international position was being transformed. The accession of Victoria cut the dynastic link that had sustained Britain's place as a continental power and helped to consolidate a process of disengagement and repositioning in imperial terms already well underway. Trading links were refocused from Europe to Latin America and Asia. Britain's global muscles were flexed. The years from around 1836 to 1844 saw a surge in missionary activity. Texts such as Henry Merivale's *Introduction to a course of lectures on Colonisation and Colonies* (1839), indicated a new belief in empire's economic and strategic benefits. Although superficially it would seem that empire remained a distant presence in British culture, the work of Catherine Hall and others has demonstrated that the liberal reforms

of the 1830s were themselves powerfully inflected by imperial concerns (Burton 2006: 213–15). In 1841 in response to the exclusion of British manufacturers from much of Europe, Lord Palmerston noted that ‘we must unremittingly endeavour to find in other parts of the world new vents for the produce of our industry’ (Williams and Ramsden 1990: 242). The existing empire was reconstituted: the dilution of East India Company control in 1833 was part of a rapid process of Westernisation in India, which took place from the later 1820s to the mid 1830s; at the Cape, the ‘Great Trek’ of 1837 consolidated British control of the coastal territories; Australia was transformed from a penal colony into a settlement colony; and in the wake of the 1838 Durham Report into the Canadian rebellions of 1837, responsible government was extended to the European inhabitants of the settler colonies. At the same time, through consolidation and acquisition the strategic scaffolding of a global empire was assembled. In 1832 Singapore was appointed the capital of the Straits Settlements, and the next decade or so saw the establishment of a chain of ports, coaling stations and naval bases tying the empire together: the Falkland Islands (1833), Aden (1839), Hong Kong (1842), Labuan (1846) and Lagos (1851). As the new steamer routes that had opened in the 1830s enhanced the significance of the Middle East as the key strategic corridor to India, so Britain, in the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1838 and then the Straits Convention of 1841, committed itself to support the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russian expansion, in the process establishing one of the cornerstones of Victorian diplomacy.

The 1830s were also a crucial period in the creation of, in Isobel Armstrong’s words, ‘an avidly scopic culture – a culture of *looking*’ (Armstrong 1996: 125). By the 1830s the railway was bringing new modes of seeing as well as travelling. The carriage window was one way in which the plate glass techniques originating at the Chance factory in Birmingham in the early 1830s created new opportunities for the gaze. Images proliferated. The market for engravings and prints (both wood cuts and copper plates) was transformed. The development of the steel engraving processes of the 1820s and chromolithography and electrotyping in the 1830s reduced prices and improved quality; the exclusivity of the print was destroyed and the density of prints in homes and publications increased rapidly. The two defining titles of Victorian graphic journalism, the *Illustrated London News* and *Punch*, were both established in 1841, consolidating a revolution in visual style that had seen Regency caricature disappear remarkably rapidly during the 1830s. ‘We know that the advent of an Illustrated Newspaper in the country *must* mark an epoch’ the *ILN* trumpeted on its launch (Stein 1987: 274). Recognition of the subjectivity of vision only intensified the search for objective knowledge based on observation and the accumulation of facts. The 1830s saw a new ‘scientific approach to nature’, a ‘shift from subject to object’ (Ball 1971: 73), and calls for the careful training of vision needed for ‘right seeing’.

The disruptive force of the railways seemed to be everywhere: the geologist Gideon Mantell grumbled that the railways ‘completely metamorphosed the English character’, bringing ‘Eternal hustle, movement with the greatest rapidity, constant change’ (quoted Radford 2003: 104). Although speed reduced duration and thus the expenditure of time in some contexts, the communications revolution did more to increase the significance of time. The operations of the railway quickly came to rely on the maintenance of a whole new technology of precise and elaborate

timetables. In education, penal policy, and the New Poor Law there was a new focus on the disciplining of time, on methods by which the student (or inmate) would be (as one essay as early as 1824 put it) ‘employed every minute of the time’ (quoted in Trodd 1994: 37). The past was suddenly all the rage. Carlyle’s essay ‘On History Again’ (1833) registers contemporary perceptions of the encompassing force of the past. ‘History with the beginnings of it stretching dimly into remote Time’ (quoted Sanders 1978: 1).

The publication of Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830–33) ushered in a period of greater scientific acceptance and popular recognition of ‘deep time’, that the earth’s age could not be encompassed by the 6,000 years of the Biblical chronology, but was many millions of years old. As palaeontology allowed the sequencing of the geological record, it also increasingly revealed strange prehistoric creatures and worlds. Not surprisingly, geology captured the public imagination in the 1830s to an unprecedented degree. From the early 1830s pictorial representations of the world of the dinosaurs began to circulate, and the deep past became vividly real in a way that had not been possible before. Geological discoveries contributed to a further critical shift, in which the 1830s were the pivotal decade, from a dominant conception of the social and natural world that was essentially static or cyclical to one that was mobile and developmental. So much so, that it is possible to see a broadly constructed ‘science of progress’ emerging in the 1830s, transcending apparently separate fields from political economy to astronomy. There is an important distinction to be made here between progressivism and ‘evolution’: but the 1830s saw the establishment of the foundations of the latter, and the very wide acceptance of the former. In astronomy, the nebular hypothesis, that stars, planets, moons had evolved from a gaseous ‘fire-mist’, was given wide currency in texts such as Nichols’ *Architecture of the Heavens* (1837). Lamarckian evolutionary ideas began to spread; they were never widely endorsed, but the concerted resistance mounted by conservative elites in the 1830s to such ideas speaks tellingly of the challenge being posed.

The feverishness of the resistance also reflected the anxiety of the Anglican elite in these years. The late 1820s and 1830s were ‘crisis years’ for the Church of England, years that transformed the relations of Church and state, and profoundly altered the nature of the Church itself. Frank Turner speaks of a ‘cultural apostasy’ of the later 1830s and 1840s, which overthrew the dominant cultural position of Anglicanism (Turner 1993). There were various signs of the erosion of the civil power of the church, including the rapid decline in the use of the death penalty after 1832, the sharp fall in the number of clerics being appointed to the magistrates bench, and in the numbers of cases being tried by clerical JPs. The Established Church Act (1836), and the Tithe Commutation Act (1836) ended key elements of the Church of England’s privileged position as the national religion. The parliamentary drive for reform opened up the threat of the church’s subordination to the state. The decade before 1837 brought a renewal of Dissenting activism after a half-century of relative quiescence. The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts gave Dissent a novel sense of its unity and power, the 1832 Reform Act supplied influence, and the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act offered power (Watts 1995). Contemporaries recognised a new puritan aggressiveness. The growth of the temperance movement, and the wide-ranging recommendations of the 1834 Select Committee

on Drunkenness indicated a more ambitious attempt at the ‘reform of manners’. Sabbatarianism revived. Four attempts at legislation between 1833 and 1837 culminated in a narrow failure in 1837 (when the measure passed a second reading but lapsed on the death of the king).

The years before Victoria’s accession also saw significant shifts in attitudes to education. Suspicion of educating the poor ‘beyond their station’, still very powerful in the 1820s, were in rapid retreat by the mid 1830s. Enquiries and reports like the Select Committee on Art and Design (1835–36) indicated both a commitment to the diffusion of knowledge and a new willingness to see it as the responsibility of the state. Central government grants for education were introduced in 1833. Science emerges as a truly independent and central enterprise. The coining of the term ‘scientist’ by William Whewell in his *History of the Inductive Sciences* (1837) registers this shift, while the formation of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1831 signalled a desire for a less dilettante science, and the establishment of the Geological Survey (1835) began the institutionalisation of state support for science. Crazes for phrenology and mesmerism prompted unprecedented popular interest in science.

One of the ironies of this welter of change was that it emerged largely independently of economic progress. It is clear that the early nineteenth-century British economy did not experience a rapid and wholesale ‘industrial revolution’; social and economic change was gradual and uneven, characterised by the interpenetration and complementary exploitation of mechanization and handicrafts. In the face of theories of discontinuity and ‘take off’, gradualists have persuasively argued for a long period of slow evolution. Nevertheless, two propositions are relatively widely held: that there was a major transformation in economy and society during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which produced an ‘industrial society’ quite different to that which had existed a century or so previously; and that the end of this process can usefully be placed around 1830 (see for example Mokyr 1993). From this perspective, the 1830s were a decade of critical change, the moment at which economic development began to accelerate significantly (see Griffin’s essay in this volume). Periods of deep cyclical depression were compounded by structural unemployment caused by the mechanisation of textiles production. This social change, given institutional expression in organisations such as the National Union of the Working Classes, and the calculations underlying the adjustments of the franchise in 1832, established ‘class’ as a fundamental category of Victorian discourse, practice and prejudice.

THE EARLY VICTORIAN PERIOD

The years from the mid 1830s to the end of the 1840s offer an obvious coherence, bound together by the social and economic hardships of the ‘hungry Forties’, the emergence and then break up of Peel’s Conservative Party, the ‘Chartist moment’, and the constitution of the condition of England question. These were years of crisis, tension and readjustment, which saw the working out of the consequences of the revolutionary changes of the decade leading up to the accession of Victoria, and the resulting consolidation of various centrally characteristic elements of the Victorian condition.

The tone of the period was dominated by some of the consequences of the longstanding processes of industrialisation and urbanisation that had culminated in the 1830s. Britain strengthened its position as the world's leading manufacturing economy. The adoption of steam-driven processes in the cotton and woollen industries of the north brought increasing numbers under the discipline of the factories, and left many handworkers to suffer the privations of overwork and structural unemployment. In Ireland, an impoverished peasantry was left to starve as the potato crops of the mid-decade years succumbed to disease. Factory and the machine were not ubiquitous but they rapidly became a dominant image of the age, symbolic of a range of attendant changes, and a powerful motor for the development of new social identities (see Gray 1996). Economic hardships combined with working-class resentments at the denial of the franchise in 1832, subsequently compounded by the harsh *laissez-faireism* of the New Poor Law, encouraged the rapid growth of the campaign for the People's Charter. Ebbing and flowing between peaks of activity in 1839, 1842 and 1848, the Chartist movement, along with Owenism and campaigns for Poor Law reform and factory legislation, ensured a sense of social and political instability that only finally waned after the ignominious dismissal of Chartist pressure in 1848.

The country's ability to contain the challenge of social and political radicalism owed much to the way the political system gradually adjusted itself to the post-1832 power balances. Party identities were consolidated. Executive control over parliament was significantly strengthened. A consensus, partial and constantly contested, but nonetheless real, emerged around a number of political principles. Its basic tenets were cheap government, 'good government', '*Laissez-faire*', 'free trade' and 'sound money', underpinned by a political philosophy of individualism and rationalism (for an exploration of the significance of sound coinage, see Alborn in this volume). During the early Victorian period the political elites successfully affirmed the impartiality of the state: dissociating it from social disputes, emphasizing its commitment to public service, absolving it of virtually all responsibility for the economy (as in the case of the 1844 Bank Charter Act, which removed the state's direct responsibility for currency). The minimalist state was sustained by the system of minimised expenditure, low tax burdens and reducing reliance on indirect duties, established in its essentials by the Peel government of the 1840s and completed by Gladstone in the 1850s. Peel's 1841–46 government reduced and abolished hundreds of duties, and introduced an income tax in peace time in Britain for the first time. Within a few years the fiscal *ancien régime* had been abolished. The basis was established for a steady and accelerating increase in per capita government expenditure through the Victorian period, and an even more rapid increase in taxable revenue. As Zoë Laidlaw's chapter demonstrates, recognition that the Victorian state was not merely a national but also an imperial institution complicates this picture without challenging its essentials.

The gradual working through of the readjustments of the 1830s was especially visible in local government, where municipal reform was articulated and extended in the localities over the ensuing decade by a stream of new incorporations. Parish vestries were finally superseded in many places, the stasis that had developed out of tensions between various local authorities was overcome, and the Tory oligarchies that had assumed control in many of the long-incorporated boroughs

were dismantled. Although local government remained predominantly bourgeois, the admission of the Liberal-Dissenting middle class created new rivalries within urban elites and necessitated a reworking of the forms and composition of social leadership in the city. Despite a hard-fought rearguard action that succeeded in smoothing some of its sharper edges, these years also saw the steady spread of the New Poor Law, and with it the establishment of the principle of ‘less eligibility’, institutionalising a set of social assumptions that persisted through to the end of century, summed up by Samuel Smiles’s suggestion in 1860 that ‘misery is the offspring of individual improvidence and vice; and it is to be cured, not so much by conferring greater rights, as by implanting better habits’ (Supple 1978: 114) (see Alex Tyrrell’s essay in this volume). For the purposes of policy, poverty was accepted as a product of individual failing, not social circumstance.

Yet these circumstances were changing. Just over a third of Britain’s population was urban according to the 1801 census; by 1841 this had increased to very nearly a half, a watershed passed sometime in the 1840s. Victorian culture was dominated by its contradictory and ambivalent attempts to make sense of this urbanisation (see essays of Dennis and Taylor in this volume). Rapid building in the 1830s and 1840s created concentrated districts of poor back-to-back houses. The slow spread of building regulations meant that some cities continued to allow back-to-back houses to be built into the 1890s, but even where prohibition was earlier, the early Victorian housing stock often dominated. Workers lived in close proximity to places of work. Forests of chimneys, industrial and domestic, brought dense smoke pollution. Buildings were blackened, as was the rain. Plants were stunted. Rivers flowing through populous districts became open sewers. Sanitary problems that came to prominence during the inquiries of the early 1840s persisted, as did an environmentalist preoccupation with housing standards (cellars, back-to-backs; multiple occupancy – the whole paraphernalia of ‘slums’ identified along with the word in the 1820s and 1830s). The economic hardships of these years, culminating in the disastrous Irish famine of the 1840s, generated the first surges of nineteenth-century emigration, turning Britain into the ‘emigrant society’ (Darwin 2009: 58) that it was throughout the century (see Richards’ essay in this volume).

G. M. Young noted in his *Victorian England* that family was one of only two ‘vital articles’ in the ‘common Victorian faith’ (Young 1960: 150–51). In the early Victorian period domestic ideals shaped perceptions of the nature of society, and were institutionalised as a key part of the response to its problems. Works such as Sarah Stickney Ellis’s *Women of England* (1838) and Sarah Lewis’s *Women’s Mission* (1839) were merely the most significant of a welter of conduct manuals and advice books that popularised and enforced explicit visions of women’s mission as ‘domestic’ (Armstrong 1987). Although these manuals were aimed at middle-class readerships, the mobilisation in the 1830s and 1840s of similar ideals by Tory Radicals like Joseph Rayner Stephens infused working-class culture with similar conceptions. Domesticity became a dominant theme of Victorian drama. It was reflected in the flood that prompted the Royal Academy in 1852 to establish the new category of ‘domestic paintings’. For the American transcendentalist R. W. Emerson, domesticity had become ‘the taproot’ of Victorian empire (quoted in Behlmer 1998: 5). Sanitary reformers, social investigators and ‘condition of England’ novelists of the 1840s shared a diagnosis of social malaise rooted in what

they saw as the deformation of working-class home life (Poovey 1995) (see Pamela Gilbert's essay in this volume).

The Victorian age cannot be reduced to the 'railway age', but tracking the characteristics of early Victorian culture rarely involves straying far from the railway. The inescapability of the railway was confirmed in the 15 years after Victoria's accession. From its hesitant early beginnings the expansion of the railways gathered pace rapidly after 1837. The travel time from London to Scotland in 1836 was 43 hours; by 1848 this had been reduced to 17. The 'railway mania' of 1845–47 drove the extension of the system from 2,000 miles in 1844 to 7,500 miles in 1852, by which time the essentials of a fully national network and the dominant railway companies of the period were in place (Freeman 1999). The railways affected life for all, fostering economic specialisation and integration, drawing the fringes into the metropolitan economy, and encouraging internal migration. Rail excursions rapidly became popular. Previously sedate seaside resorts mushroomed. Steam trains and packets steadily improved the speed of postal communications. Having doubled between 1839 and 1840, the numbers of letters carried by the Royal Mail doubled again by 1849, and thereafter continued to double on a per capita basis every 20 years (Daunton 1985). Mail-based businesses expanded rapidly. The railway enabled the rapid growth of periodical publishing. 'Cheap Periodicals belong to the age of the Railway! . . . light postage, quick transit, cheap Bibles and cheap Periodicals for the Millions of England!', declaimed one Congregationalist minister (quoted in Cunningham 1975: 53). 'Popular' series, like Routledge's 'Railway Library' launched in 1848, selling reprinted fiction to the middle classes at 1s–2s, proliferated. By the later 1840s 'yellowbacks' (including G.W.M. Reynolds' *Loves of the Harem*) and 'penny dreadfuls' including *Varney the Vampire, or the Feast of Blood* (1847) were squeezing out traditional chapbooks and creating a genuine mass book market (St Clair 2004). The international reading cultures that resulted are explored in Jonathan Rose's essay in this volume.

Just as technological developments underpinned the publishing revolution, so the development of electroplying in the 1830s made possible a new mass market for engraved reproductions, fostered by the rapid spread of local art unions and commercial printsellers. The early Victorian years saw the consolidation of a new visuality, exemplified by the novel relationships of text and image inscribed in the modes of illustrated fiction installed almost overnight, it seemed, by the success of *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and *Pickwick Papers*. The proliferation of visual shows in early Victorian popular science culture indicated the popular appetite for spectacle. By 1839–40 the London Colosseum was offering optical illusions of the 'World of Spirits', an achromatic solar microscope, and a Gregorian reflecting telescope. The 1840s saw the rapid consolidation of the illustrated novel, and the popularity of profusely illustrated popular historical, scientific and topographical books issued by publishers like Charles Knight or the Chambers brothers. The decade also saw the creation of new forms of graphic journalism evident in the establishment of a number of illustrated periodicals, which became characteristic of the whole period, most prominently the *Illustrated London News*, *Punch* and *The Builder* (1843). The formation of the Printsellers' Association in 1847 reflected the rapid expansion of the trade of print sellers and publishers, largely through sales of engravings of popular pictures by leading contemporary painters. In the provinces, an industrial

exhibition at the Manchester Mechanics' Institute in December 1837 instituted an exhibition movement that pointed the way to the 1851 Great Exhibition.

Governmental information-gathering bureaucracies expanded significantly. Annual crime returns (1836), the registration of births, marriages and deaths (1837), the first full/efficient census (1841), the Ordnance and Tithe surveys of the 1840s, the construction of urban police forces, the new statistical societies, all reflected a shift towards what Thomas Kuhn has described as an 'avalanche of numbers' appearing around 1840, penetrating Victorian culture from the physical sciences to philanthropic action (Kuhn 1979: 219–20). The enumerative imperialism identified by Bernard Cohn was one result (Cohn 1996). All this contributed to a strain of what J. S. Mill described as the 'vulgar' empiricism of Victorian Britain; a belief of 'practical men' that knowledge could be achieved by the accumulation of information, which was reflected in the suspicion of theory and inclination to expediency characteristic of Victorian political thought (Smith 1994), and the 'almost anti-intellectual pragmatism' of Victorian sanitary reformers (Wohl 1983: 72). Notoriously, condition-of-England novelists ransacked the 'bluebooks' for raw material, creating fiction that aspired to the condition of a parliamentary investigation. Like so much else characteristic of Victorian culture, realism had strong roots back into the eighteenth century, but it was elevated to a new level of systematic deployment from the mid 1840s onwards. Thereafter the broad appeal of realist approaches is demonstrated by the shift from caricature to Victorian naturalism discernible in the book illustration from the 1840s, and in the standards of verisimilitude that dominated Victorian painting. Despite the attacks of *fin de siècle* modernists, this was never a matter of the purely superficial: the formulations of Victorian realism were fired through with recognition of the way in which understandings of the world were mediated by unstable representations and by their acceptance of the importance of intuition or imagination.

Railways and telegraphs also intensified the 'sensation of time' (*Quarterly Review* 1842, quoted in Radford 2003: 96). Temporal anxieties reflected the extent to which time acquired a new cultural role dramatised by factory time and national 'railway time'. The first train companies were reluctant to run to fixed timetables of arrival, precisely because they worried that they would not be able to meet the discipline imposed; but carriage of the post from 1838 brought with it the obligation to timetabling and punctuality. The timetable required synchronisation across the network, which encouraged the establishment of 'national time'. Greenwich time was officially adopted in 1848, and although it was not until 1880 that an Act of Parliament was passed standardising time in UK, in practice it had happened much earlier. The more potentially unruly the clientele, the more minutely scheduled the day. Many of the institutional articulations of what has been described as the (early) Victorian 'revolution in government', not just the work-house, but the state schools, the prisons and reformatories, were predicated on the overt and explicit use of new forms of temporal discipline. Staff at Pentonville prison were subjected to a system of 'tell-tale' clocks that required officers to clock in around the prison. Time was commodified; industrial management evolved a new paraphernalia of regulations, supervision and 'time boards'. In the textile factories of the north (at least) clearer regulatory and definitional regimes of time were essentially consolidated in the 1830s and 1840s, when greater capital

investment prompted heightened pressures to exploit plant to the full, and brought a new emphasis on saving time as much as saving labour. The result was an intensification of controversies over the working day, and a gradual concession of the justification and need to regulate the hours of factory children (visible in the Acts of 1833, 1847, 1850). In this sense, the early Victorian period was something of a watershed, bringing the end of a long period of intensification of work pressures and erosion of leisure opportunities. The trend in Victorian Britain, haltingly and reluctantly, was downward. (For the impact on Victorian leisure cultures, see Peter Bailey's essay in this volume.)

Slowly but surely contemporaries began to conceive of their times as years of progress and advance. As Billie Melman has demonstrated (see her essay in this volume), early Victorian culture came to be marked by peculiarly intense engagements with 'history' and its various forms. During the 1840s the incipient evolutionism of the 1830s was articulated by Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844). *Vestiges* certainly did not produce any sort of consensus in favour of evolution; hostility was still widespread, not just from the religious establishment, but also within the scientific community. But it did produce converts (including A. R. Wallace, who was already an evolutionist by 1845), and reduced the shock value of evolution, making it a familiar concept to many. During the 1840s onwards geologists developed geological maps, which established firm agreement on the nature of the geological strata and their global equivalences. The idea of 'deep time' was popularised in books such as James Gray's *Earth's Antiquity* (1849). Historical and archaeological societies proliferated. Hampton Court was open free from November 1838 and attracted large crowds, as did the Tower of London. The early Victorian period was the heyday of the historical novel, while the medieval revival underway in the 1820s reached new heights in the excesses of the Eglinton tournament and Tennyson's Arthurian romances.

The upheavals of the pre-Victorian period all promoted a sense of religious crisis and challenge, but in turn also encouraged renewals and reinvigorations as organised religion took on the threats represented by industrialisation, urbanisation and scepticism. The early Victorian years were ones of Anglican revival, most visible in the claims of the Oxford movement to rediscover the purity of the early Church, but actually pervading all parties in the Church. The protestant religions shared in many respects a common culture: evangelicalism, anti-Catholicism, Puritanism, the pattern of congregational and parochial life, and all felt the challenges of early Victorian science and Biblical criticism. Nevertheless, as a revitalised Church faced a reenergised Nonconformity, enduring lines of interdenominational conflict were set down. The strident intolerance of the high church *Record* faced up to the shrill resentments of the *Nonconformist*. Sir James Graham's 1843 Factory Education Bill was in many respects the crucible of these developments, adding educational sensibilities to the mix, prompting the coining of the term 'voluntaryism', and helping crystallise pressures for disestablishment into the Anti-State Church Association, formed a year later in 1844. Lord Shaftesbury remarked that the educational standoff of 1843 fixed the limits of what either Dissent or Anglicanism could achieve, and it created (in Geoffrey Best's words) 'a kind of self-acting principle of equilibrium', which regulated the denominational struggles of the subsequent 50 years (quoted in Sellars 1977: 72). By the mid 1840s the fundamental configurations

of Victorian religion are discernible. Even though the Anglican church retained many of its privileges, Britain was a pluralistic society in a way that it had not been before. In education an indirect bipartisanship and denominational provision survived, albeit in various guises, until the end of the century. At the same time, the transformation of Rugby School under Thomas Arnold, with its emphasis on the school as place of serious education and the provision of the moral equipment required for a fruitful life, and the surge of new boarding school foundations in the 1840s, established the foundations of what John Tosh has described as ‘the moral rearmament of the Victorian governing classes’ (Tosh 2005: 85). (It also, as Victor Gonzalez-Macias’ essay in this volume demonstrates, contributed to the propagation of Victorian ideals across both formal and informal empire.) At the same time, vigorous efforts were made to reach out to the apparently unchurched urban masses. Between 1840 and 1855 the Ecclesiastical Commission endowed or augmented 5,300 parishes from offices scheduled for abolition by the Cathedrals Act of 1840. In the years after the establishment of the London City Mission in 1836, similar associations were established across the provinces, along with innumerable congregational and parochial societies. By the end of the decade virtually every London parish had its district visiting society. The multiplication of Anglican churches in urban areas, even setting aside the spread of Nonconformist alternatives, encouraged a *de facto* congregationalism in which parishes ceased to be the single provision for a discrete neighbourhood, and instead competed for congregations on the basis of their clergy, service and institutional life.

THE MID-VICTORIAN PERIOD

By the later 1840s many of the challenges characteristic of the early Victorian period were receding. It is possible to suggest that the events of 1846, the repeal of the Corn Laws and the consequent break-up of the Conservative Party under Peel, marked the end of this opening phase. Justifying 1846 as the opening date of his New Oxford History of England, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, Theo Hoppen has suggested that it ‘marked a decisive step in the process of reform inaugurated by the franchise concessions of 1832’ and was ‘the central rite of passage of Victorian politics’ (Hoppen 1998: 127). This is not entirely convincing. Certainly the decision for repeal was presented as a fundamental blow to the power of the aristocracy and an assertion of the political power of the new middle classes; but in reality Peel’s decision was a defensive one, to save further undermining of the landed interest by the creation of 40 shilling freeholds. The Tory Party was fractured, and its prospects further weakened by the death of Peel in 1850, leaving it effectively excluded from power for the next 30 years; but Manchester School radicalism was equally marginalised. Repeal did not mark the crucial repudiation of mercantilism and protectionism. Although the Conservative Party reluctantly accepted the electoral necessity of abandoning the Corn Laws in the 1850s, its commitment to free trade was always fragile. In the immediate aftermath Britain was still more protectionist than France, and the policy of reducing tariffs remained contested (see Howe’s essay in this volume). Reciprocity if not the forcible opening of global markets remained widespread aspirations, even amongst free trade radicals, despite the hostility of Cobden and his immediate followers.

Nevertheless, in the ensuing years repeal and further gradual progress towards tariff liberalisation via the 1849 repeal of the Navigation Acts seemed to have paved the way for an improvement in the economy. Historians now repudiate once conventional descriptions of the years from 1851–73 as the ‘mid-Victorian boom’. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that around 1850 the British economy entered calmer waters. Structural unemployment associated with the shift to mechanised production in the 1830s and 1840s became less obvious. (Indeed later critics have noted that the failure of the leading sectors of the British economy to continue to embrace technological improvements saw them already falling behind international rivals in these years.) Although punctuated by a number of sharp reverses, the period brought several short expansionary bursts and a much more buoyant labour market. The impression of domestic security and improvement was stiffened by the visible diminishing of not just middle- but also working-class radicalism. The Financial and Parliamentary Reform Association failed to inherit the momentum of the Anti-Corn Law League. For a while in 1848, revolutions in Europe seemed to presage a decisive transformation. Even once it became clear that the ferment would end only in defeat and containment, 1848 remained for contemporaries an extraordinary year, ‘the most memorable of the present century’ (Anon. 1849). But it was the immunity of Britain that struck contemporaries most. The continental upheavals encouraged the emergence of Christian socialism, and provided a formative moment in the experience of many liberals of the later Victorian years (Harvie 1976). But for Chartism the decisive government resistance to its mobilisation at Kennington Common in April 1848 left its strategy in tatters and its leadership disgraced, despite the accession of strength promised by the upsurge of nationalist rebelliousness in Ireland. Although the movement limped on, as John Saville notes, independent politics for most working people no longer appeared practicable, and their energies went into a wide variety of socially useful or emotionally satisfying organisations related more and more to the here and now (Saville 1987). The year 1848 seems to mark a decisive repudiation by the skilled working class of mass radicalism. Bureaucratisation and centralisations of the so-called ‘new model unionism’ of the 1850s in effect only consolidated and extended established craft union practices, building on shifts to national organisation that commenced in the 1830s and encompassed craft and factory organisation. This brought a new group of influential trade union leaders who helped to gain acceptance for unionism and establish a particular ‘craft union’ style: defensive, of limited aspiration, sectional, preoccupied with respectability and male. Saville’s argument, largely consistent with Barry Godfrey’s discussion of the disciplinary institutions of Victorian culture in his chapter in this volume, is that accounts of the mid-century watershed that stress economic improvement must be balanced by a recognition of the role the exercise of state power played in working-class demobilisation.

If 1848 saw the final flourish of early Victorian physical force radicalism, it was 1851 that confirmed the opening of a new phase of the Victorian period. Hence George Stocking’s description of 1851 as a ‘precipice in time’ (Stocking 1987: 4). At the heart of this fracture was the Great Exhibition. ‘It inaugurates an era’, noted the *Manchester Examiner and Times* (Anon. 1852b: 4). Between May and October 1851 over six million visitors drawn from across Britain and the globe entered the magnificent glass and iron ‘Crystal Palace’ in Hyde Park. The Exhibition not only

affirmed Britain's global industrial leadership, it contributed to a reaffirmation of monarchy and especially of the place of Prince Albert. The sober behaviour of the many visitors and the collaboration of so many working-class committees offered reassurance about the stability and viability of British society. Contemporaries celebrated the Exhibition as a monument to middle-class values and success, a triumph of technology (Davis 1999). Whatever its direct influence, the Exhibition came for Victorians to occupy a privileged symbolic position: as A.V. Dicey put it, looking back from 1914, 'The Exhibition of 1851 had a significance which is hardly understood by the present generation. . . . The ideas of the political economists, and above all the dogma of *laissez-faire*, had, it was thought, achieved a final victory' (quoted in Rance 1991: 23). Contemporaries saw the Great Exhibition as announcing a period of optimism and progress, ushering in a time 'of internal balance, and widespread though not universal contentment' (Briggs 1967: 394).

It certainly consolidated the era of spectacle. The Crystal Palace itself opened up significant new possibilities for using natural light in large buildings, a 'comprehensive institutional change' as Andrew Miller has described it, 'part of a complex of developments in museums, department stores, exhibitions and galleries', as well as in domestic spaces (Miller 1995: 6). It also provided a model for a series of new museums and galleries, such as the Oxford Museum and the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art, where largescale iron and glass roofing created light-filled exhibition spaces and also arcades and shops, such as the Crystal Palace Bazaar, a shopping galleria off Oxford Street, which had a dramatic stained glass ceiling under a glass and iron roof. In turn, the spread of plate glass inspired a number of new 'glass cultures', such as the aquaria craze of the 1850s. Glass display cases helped to objectify and open out to view the artefacts they contained and the cultures and histories they sought to represent, offering, for Anthony Trollope, a metaphor for Victorian fiction writing generally (Garrett 1980: 190–91).

Although historians are rightly wary of arguments that rely on assessments of shifts in 'mood' or atmosphere, there is little doubt that the years after 1851 were much less fraught with social tensions than those before 1848. A new consensus emerged around elements of the Victorian ideology, such as the tenets of classical political economy that had struggled to establish general assent in the 1840s. Herbert Spencer's *Social Statistics* (1851) offered a manual of liberal individualism and evolutionary sociology, presenting the 'starvation of the idle' as 'the decrees of a large, far-seeing, benevolence' (quoted in Stoddart 1998: 77). As Michael Lobban's essay demonstrates, the *laissez-fairism* of the state was never crude or monolithic, and in the case of judicial law often expressed in surprisingly moralistic terms. Even so, the limits were real: symptomatically, when Ruskin published his highly critical *Unto this Last* essays in the *Cornhill* in 1860, the outcry was so great that the series had to be abandoned. As the centrifugal forces of the early Victorian crisis waned, so tendencies to fragmentation and accommodation gained impetus. The cultural differences between a largely craft-based 'labour aristocracy' and the less-skilled remainder widened, as the aristocrats constructed a largely exclusive network of unions, voluntary associations and styles of life. In the textile districts, the larger employers dulled the force of social conflict through the articulation of often complex processes of factory paternalism: not merely a matter

of wages, but also of a 'stream of social life', works dinners, libraries, baths and burial societies, banners and brass bands (Joyce 1980: 145). Outside of the larger employers similar roles were played by structures of philanthropy, which both created ties of reciprocal duty and obligation, but also, along with municipal leadership, provided a basis for the assertion of more diffuse forms of middle-class authority (see Donna Loftus' chapter in this volume). In rural areas even national associations like the Oddfellows operated to enforce elite leadership, dominated by local clergy and gentry. Philanthropy and the parallel organisations of rational recreation encouraged the cult of respectability, a powerful structuring distinction that cut across class, its distinctions no respecters of occupation, income or residence. By creating generalised codes of behaviour that emphasised moral worth and character, notions of respectability provided a channel into the conventional orthodoxies of mid-Victorianism, including the ideas of self-reliance and individual improvement codified and celebrated by Samuel Smiles in works such as *Self-Help* (1859), *Character* (1871) and *Thrift* (1875).

The mid-century transition should not be overplayed. In recent years economic historians have pointed out that the statistical evidence for the sort of economic progress that would justify mid-Victorian smugness is uneven at best; but for whatever reasons contemporaries remained assured, confident and convinced of Britain's success. There was substantial expansion in coal mining and mechanical engineering. Railway construction continued apace; the just over 6,000 miles of track in 1850 had been extended to nearly 13,500 in 1870, while passenger journeys had grown almost five-fold. Britain consolidated its world leadership in ship-building and shipping. The value of British imports and exports grew substantially, its share of world trade peaking (at around a quarter) in the mid 1860s, and its share of manufacturing exports perhaps as high as 40 per cent. Rising prices from around 1850 to the early 1870s bolstered optimism, without providing a barrier to improvements in working-class living standards, and especially diets, even if perhaps only from the 1860s. Even so, the economic system continued to be vulnerable to sharp crises (the one of 1857–58 being particularly acute), and progress seems to have come, where it came at all, in fits and starts.

Urban conditions remained stubbornly resistant to improvement. Resort to Royal Commissions peaked in the 1850s, but remained frequent until the 1880s. The 1848 Public Health Act and the General Board of Health it established had little noticeable impact on sanitary conditions, and the General Board was abandoned in 1858. Unsurprisingly, there was little evidence of any change in the Victorian demographic regime, although the mid-Victorian years do seem to have produced a temporary hiatus in the decline of the birth rate. The proportion of children under 14 peaked around 1825, but remained largely stable from the 1840s to the 1880s before beginning its steeper twentieth-century decline. Crude death rates remained relatively constant from 1837 to the early 1880s (with a slight sign of improvement from the 1860s). Patterns of sickness and ill-health showed similar stabilities (see Mackinnon's essay in this volume). Although 1849 was the last widespread epidemic in Britain, cholera was almost a 'Victorian' disease: it appeared first after 1815, but had its first major outbreak in 1832, and only came under effective control in the final years of the century (aided by Koch's discovery of the cholera vibrio in 1883–84).

The abandonment of the General Board of Health in 1858 reflected the retreat of the Benthamite and paternalist impulses of the 1840s and the triumph of a more permissive Liberalism. The mid-Victorian years were ones of Liberal domination: between 1847 and 1868 the Conservatives lost six successive general elections and held power only briefly in minority. In the wake of the Conservative split of 1846, Westminster politics entered a period of uncertainty and flux, which contributed to a widespread sense of stasis. Although the migration of the Peelites into the new Liberal alliance took time, the broad outlines of the two-party system were not challenged. Recognising the degree to which Victorian parties remained loose confederations with little central control over localities, there is no need to talk about decline in party in the wake of Peel's 'apostasy'. (Indeed what really shocked Tories about Peel was not so much his policies as his disregard of the importance of party.) The Peelites retained their own coherent identity and subsumed themselves relatively happily into the Liberal ranks in 1857, after which the two-party alignment was re-established without comment or commotion. Meanwhile, a succession of Liberal governments took up the laissez-faire tenets of Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), that the state should stand aside wherever possible and leave public action to the individual and voluntary associations. The 'great' Gladstonian budgets of 1853–55 and 1859–65 extended the principles of free trade and retrenchment. The consolidation of the Gladstonian state bore fruit in the accommodation of working-class radicalism. Many in the working class might still be deeply suspicious of privilege and authority, might still rail against 'class government' and slave-driving employers, but they did not feel as fundamentally alienated from the state or the political system as their political forebears (Lawrence 1998: 87). Liberal hegemony was cemented by its dominance of the newspaper field, which was certainly tightened in these years; but the most significant development was probably the emergence of the major provincial dailies, responding to the cheapening in the press brought by a further round of removals of duties on newspapers (advertising duty 1853, stamp duty 1855 and paper duty 1861), and parallel developments of the rotary press. The result was a dramatic expansion: as many as three quarters of the newspapers in existence in 1867 had been established since 1853. Journalism helped sustain the culture of extra-parliamentary pressure, while at the same time encouraging a proliferation of pressure groups, which assisted the relative autonomy of the governing elite (see Law's essay in this volume).

At the same time, under the influence of Palmerston, who was the party's dominant figure from 1848 to his death in 1865, Liberalism in the mid-Victorian years adopted a more interventionist inflexion of the traditional themes of British foreign policy. A willingness to implement a more assertive foreign policy was visible in Palmerston's successful likening in 1850 of Britain to the Roman empire, and culminated in the policies that eventually produced the 1853–56 Crimean War. In the decade after the end of the war Palmerston's policy, despite presentational elements that were often objectionable to political friends as well as foes, reinforced a consistent line of policy – the avoidance of war, management by an informal concert of great powers, modest support for British trading interests, resistance to Russian expansion in the Near and Middle East as a threat to British imperial interests in India and the Far East, and support for the extension of liberal regimes

in Europe. In this Palmerston and his policy reflected the extent to which from the 1840s the international orientation of the British economy had been extended and intensified. Debate about the 'balance sheet' of imperialism visibly dissipated, its fire not to be rekindled until the later 1890s. Radical attacks were dismissed. Imperial commitment remained understated, but pride in empire was affirmed and, as Patrick Brantlinger's essay in this volume shows, Britain's diverse cultural engagements with empire filled out. Krishan Kumar's essay examines the way colonies came to be seen as an instance of the 'high destiny which this exercise of our national energy develops [sic]' (*Manchester Guardian*, quoted in Martin 1975: 92). Piecemeal *ad hoc* imperial expansion continued, although in the 20 years after 1848 change in the extent of the empire was of unparalleled smallness. At the same time, and not without tensions and suspicions, as the essays in this volume of Finn, Inglis and Gikandi demonstrate, versions of a common British culture were reformulated and reproduced in both settler and non-settler colonies.

Consciousness of empire steadily deepened; 1851 was not without its worrying portents. For *The Times*, one blemish had been that 'We have seen a British colony in South Africa [becoming] a settlement of herdsmen and traders lapsing into a chain of military posts held with vast bloodshed and costs against implacable savages' (Anon. 1852a). If the Crimean War emphasised the place of the near East in the geography of empire, the Indian Mutiny, as Lauren Goodlad's chapter explores, threw into doubt previous understandings of empire as a temporary tutelage. The suppression of the revolt of 1865 in Jamaica revealed a more brutal impulse to imperial authority. Racial attitudes were beginning to harden; notions of trusteeship were being transformed (see the essays in this volume of Kennedy, Lester and Pernau).

The strengthening of imperial and global perspectives was facilitated by the technological revolution in global communications achieved in the 1850s, as the age of railways spread to Britain's colonies in North America and India, and opened out into the more general age of steam. Rapid falls in shipping costs greatly encouraged the expansion of world trade and economic specialisation. A global telegraphic network was gradually extended, as the technical problems posed by laying long distance submarine cables were overcome. Links to the continent and Ireland were in place by 1851–52. The first attempts to connect Britain to America and to India in the 1850s failed. But as a result of the work of William Thompson, more reliable links to India and the United States were secured by 1866. By the early 1870s a global system (albeit patchy) was in place (China and Japan were connected in 1870, Australia in 1871) (see Hugill in this volume). Britain dominated global communications. John Pender's Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company made two-thirds of the world's cables before 1900 and most of the other third was made by three other British companies. British control of these networks enabled her to manipulate critical flows of diplomatic information. There was a 'telegraphic moment' in mid-Victorian Britain, when excitement with the potential of the telegraph as a cutting edge communications technology was widely celebrated in poetry and prose.

The Crimean War also marked a stage in the development of Victorian visual cultures, not least in the acceptance of the camera, not just as a new way of seeing but also a new mode of documenting, a perception widely established by the

exhibition and sales of Roger Fenton's photographs of the Crimean War, and confirmed by subsequent usage by explorers, military expeditions, colonial administrators, police forces and medical practitioners. Photography came fully into its own in the 1850s. Within a few years of the patenting of the system in France in 1854, as many as 300 million *cartes de visite* were being sold annually in Britain, generating a thriving culture of trade in and collection of photographic portraits of well-known figures, and contributing to emerging cultures of celebrity. From this point on it is not too far fetched to suggest that Victorian culture was dominated by 'centred subjectivity' of the photographic print, the omniscient narrator and the cartographer. Despite recognitions of the problems of misperception emphasised by the craze for optical toys like the stereoscope that marked the 1850s, the photograph was overwhelmingly seen as a direct representation of nature. The camera, Lady Eastlake observed in 1857, could 'give evidence of facts, as minutely and as impartially as, to our shame, only an unreasoning machine can' (quoted in Robertson 1978: 186). The photographic was adopted as a standard of truth. In the preparation of *Derby Day* W.P. Frith employed a photographer to take pictures of as many racegoers as he could, while the *Saturday Review* praised the 'photographic reproduction' provided by George Eliot's fiction (Witemeyer 1979: 2). Harro Maas' essay in this volume considers one particular inflexion of this standard.

W. L. Burn, in his influential study *The Age of Equipoise*, presented the formal family photograph as the epitome of mid-Victorianism. Certainly ideals of family and of home were celebrated and extended in the mid-Victorian years, reinforced by many streams: the ideas of Comte, popularised after the translation of his *System of Positive Polity* in 1851; of Ruskin as developed in *Sesame and Lilies*; of Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House* (first published 1854–56 and subsequently extended). The middle-class fiction market was dominated by the domestic sagas of Dinah Mulock and Margaret Oliphant, perhaps launched by Bulwer Lytton's *The Caxtons* of 1849. Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*, originally published in 1838, went through nearly 40 editions from 1850 to 1860. Separate spheres ideologies tightened their grip across the social spectrum. The circumscribed mid-Victorian women's movement, associated above all with the Langham Place Group, which flourished from the later 1850s to the mid-1860s, challenged the constraints that flowed from the practice of separate spheres without confronting its ideological underpinnings. Their preoccupation was more access to education and employment than enfranchisement; their watchwords were caution and decorum.

Although the fact of deep time was widely accepted, and the outlines of the earth's geological history established, much remained to be confirmed and understood. From the 1840s onwards geologists focused on establishing firm agreement on the nature of the geological strata and their global equivalences, developed in geological maps. But even by 1859 only relatively small areas of the globe had been mapped geologically. From the mid-1850s one of London's most popular attractions was the palaeontology park created at the Sydenham pleasure gardens, complete with life-sized prehistorical animals from Triassic reptiles to the dinosaurs of the Cretaceous period, which made visual representations of deep time accessible to a vast new public. Forty thousand people attended the opening. Models and posters circulated widely. Books, such as Guillaume Louis Figuier's *The World Before*

the Deluge (1863) reflected an enduring fascination with the pictorial representation of deep time. During the mid-century years a historical horizon immense in comparison to what had been conventional became widely accepted. The visit of Donati's comet in 1858, and not apparently due again for 2,100 years, reminded mid-Victorians of the vast timescales of space. Generally even writers determined to retain the Biblical narrative accepted the overall outlines of the new theories, while adopting a range of compromises or special pleadings. As archaeological explorations of the ancient civilisations of the Middle East, such as the discoveries of Layard and Rawlinson at Nimrud and Nineveh in the later 1840s and 1850s, worked to thrust the history of humanity further back into prehistory, so such stratagems came under increasing strain.

In this respect 1859 has some claim as marking a concentrated moment of change, at least in the intellectual history of the Victorian period. The appearance of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, followed quickly afterwards by *Essays and Reviews* (1860), brought to a greatly more powerful focus a number of pressures that had been building over the previous 20 years. By advancing the theory of 'natural selection', *The Origin of Species* offered a thorough-going challenge to the centrality of God in nature fundamental to Christian cosmology, and to the wider arguments of natural theology that the adaptation of species was evidence of divine design. The *Origin* paved the way for popular texts like Charles Lyell's widely read *The Antiquity of Man* (1863) and Sir John Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times* (1865). By 1868 the evidence of the antiquity of man was so overwhelming that even outspoken opponents were forced to concede. But neither the *Origin*, nor infamous exchanges like that between Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford in 1860, in which Wilberforce enquired as to whether Darwin was descended from an ape on his mother's side or his father's side, produced the intellectual rout of religion, never mind its institutional demobilisation. The consolations of natural theology really only dissolved in the final years of the century. There remained rich resources for the incorporation of evolution, and even elements of natural selection, into essentially religious frameworks, as the works of Philip Gosse, one of Darwin's most important popularisers, demonstrated, just as there remained a powerful force of theism in Victorian scientific culture.

In Biblical criticism, scholarly dispute became public controversy in the mid 1850s. There was a gradual acceptance of the appropriateness of applying critical methods to the Bible. Benjamin Jowett's edition of *Paul's Epistles* (1855) suggested that intellectuals of Jowett's stamp at least felt the need to promulgate a Christianity more open to non-literal interpretation, and less hostile to science. His call in *Essays and Reviews* to 'Interpret the Scriptures like any other book' was deeply controversial, but his essay sought not to diminish the Bible to the status of just another book, but to adopt critical approaches so as to increase its 'moral power' by revealing its 'true meaning' (Jones 2007: 62–63). After 1860 the controversies over *Essays and Reviews* and Bishop Colenso's *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (1862) finally brought Biblical criticism into the mainstream. Certainly the failure to impeach the authors of *Essays and Reviews* encouraged an atmosphere of discernibly greater freedom, although perhaps not science's assertion of intellectual hegemony.

As the first half of the 1860s progressed, signs of strain in the mid-Victorian equipoise began to extend beyond the implications of Darwinism. Despite widespread support for the Confederacy, the mobilisation of support, especially in the textile districts, for Lincoln and the Union cause helped rekindle support for further franchise extension. Above all the 1860s are associated with the rapid emergence and immense popularity of the sensation fiction launched by Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White* (1859–60), and echoed in Dion Boucicault's play *The Colleen Bawn*, which helped initiate an important shift in Victorian theatre to the long run. Lynda Nead's essay in this volume illustrates some of the tensions around social and gender conventions increasingly visible in the 1860s. In sensation, and its many resonances in art, politics, music and even in sectarian tensions, Nicholas Daly has suggested it is possible to see the beginnings of a modern cultural consciousness (Daly 2009).

THE VICTORIAN *ENTR'ACTE*

Unsurprisingly, contemporaries saw in the second half of the 1860s a further phase of transition, from one phase of the Victorian period to another. In the period after 1867 the strains of mid-Victorian Britain became more acute. Conventionally the marker of this transition has been the second Reform Act of 1867. Certainly contemporaries experienced 1867 as a year of crisis without parallel since 1848, if not before. 'Morally and physically', the editor of the *English Mechanic* wrote, 'the year 1867 has had few equals since the era of the last great war and we fervently trust we will never see its like again' (quoted in Russell 1983: 224). The speed with which the reform crisis of the mid 1860s was whipped up, and the unanticipated reappearance of civil disorder on the streets of London during the 1866 Hyde Park riots, created an unexpectedly sudden sense of disturbance, heightened by the commercial crisis created by the collapse of Overend and Gurney in May 1866, trade union violence in Sheffield in the following October, bread riots in the East End of London in January 1867 and Fenian 'outrages' in England and Ireland that followed in the spring. The Queen was not alone amongst the elite in fearing revolution in the early months of 1867 (Cowling 1967).

Revolution was never a realistic possibility, but the political crisis produced a frisson of *bouleversement*. Contemporaries tended to speak in apocalyptic terms of parliamentary reform, as a 'leap in the dark' or even a shooting of Niagara Falls. In Manchester in 1867 even the leading Liberals were said to be 'frightened out of their wits by the borough franchise' (quoted in Vincent 1966: 251). Liberal intellectuals like Matthew Arnold remained calmer, but in works such as *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) expressed alarm at the consequences of the widened franchise. Meanwhile, from 1867 to 1870, other developments contributed to the sense of entering uncharted waters. The judgement in *Hornby vs Close* (1867) appeared to deprive trades unions of any legal protection of their funds, and encouraged the formation of the Trades Union Congress, which met for the first time the following year. In 1867 the women's movement was given new impetus by a speech of J. S. Mill in the Commons; the publication two years later of his *The Subjection of Women*, significantly written in the 1850s, but withheld until the end of the 1860s because Mill judged publication futile before that point, suggested that cracks in the

carapace of separate spheres were finally appearing. Britain's poor showing at the 1867 Paris Exhibition suddenly called into question the easy superiority of 1851. The emergence of Prussia after its defeats of Austria in 1866 and France in 1870–71 prompted the *Edinburgh Review* to suggest that 'the system of European policy has been destroyed' (quoted by Stoddart 1998: 72). Meanwhile the British North America Act of March 1867 created the nation of Canada, while reform in New Zealand gave four seats to Maori representatives for the first time (for this see Lester's essay below). Looking back to 1867 from 1872 Walter Bagehot saw 'a change not in one point, but in a thousand points . . . a change not of particular details but of pervading spirit'; part of a generational watershed, whose origins could be traced back to the death of Palmerston in 1865 and Russell's retirement from public life in 1866 (to which was soon added the death of Derby in 1869) (Bagehot 1872: 3).

The period from the later 1860s to the mid 1880s did not establish a clear identity to contemporaries. It does not offer a self-contained literary moment. Even the minor novelists, such as Charles Reade and Henry Kingsley, or Rhoda Broughton whose work is perhaps most characteristic of the period, are far from bound by it. Not surprisingly, recent scholarship has demonstrated a tendency to skate over the period, and an unwillingness to give it close attention. Yet despite tendencies to hook these years uneasily to the later Victorian period, or perhaps to split them around 1875 so as to generate a version of the conventional tripartite division, closer inspection suggests an important difference from the years that preceded and follow them; if only as a bridge, an *entr'acte*, a point at which mid- and late-Victorian tectonic plates slid across each other. The reform agitation of the mid 1860s and the fear that it might presage a more general breakdown in the social order and a reversion into a form of barbarism looms large. The period coincides largely with Arnold's career as cultural critic. Ruskin's mature criticism, including *Fors Clavigera* (1871–84), in which (as with other writing) his criticisms of contemporary middle-class values became more and more strident, and with John Morley's editorship of the *Fortnightly Review* (1867–82). In their different ways all three were concerned with the acute tensions within Liberalism brought on not just by the challenges of the post-1867 political system, but also by the confusing combination of a growing sense of economic depression alongside an increasingly consumerist, and indeed materialist, society, the target of Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875). The 'episodic shift', obliquely experienced, that Williamson has identified around 1867, which ushered in a sustained period of declining income inequality, called into question the social exclusions on which the Liberal ideal was based (Williamson 1985), just as anxieties about the fragmentation of Victorian intellectual life began to grip (see Whyte's essay in this volume).

Ironically, the impact of the Act of 1867 was less dramatic than contemporaries had feared, reflecting the intention of politicians that the franchise extensions should effect adjustment rather than revolution. The Liberals remained in office for 12 of the 18 years between 1868 and 1885, although Disraeli's victory in 1874 did hint at shifts in the terms of political conflict. The parties continued to manifest 'two opposite moods of the English mind', as Salisbury put it in 1872 (quoted in Taylor 1975: 37). The year 1867, for all its apparent daring, did little more than make

the good the worst of the anomalies untouched by 1832. It may have reinvigorated the cultures of popular politics, but they remained predicated on the belief that civic rights derived from property ownership, even if the requisite degree of property ownership was diluted. A borough householder franchise tied to payments of rates was created, producing an electorate just over a quarter working class, more so in England, but less in Scotland and Wales. The traditional pro-rural balance was maintained: only 52 seats were redistributed, and large cities like Birmingham and Manchester were fobbed off with an extra MP. Between 1867 and 1885, 106 of the 263 English borough members sat for towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants. Additional restrictions made the apparent generosity of the franchise extension less so in reality. The £10 rating franchise for lodgers was so high, and subject to so many other conditions of registration, that it rarely amounted to very much; and the average period of residence required (which worked out at 25 months) denied many householders the vote. Perhaps as much was done by the 1872 Ballot Act and the concurrent abandonment of the hitherto important principle of the personal payment of rates. Parliament remained at least partially autonomous of the electorate as the ability of the Liberal government to deflect the considerable extra-parliamentary pressure of its supporters indicated.

This autonomy was significant, because there were signs in the years after 1867 of the promise of a more interventionist state. Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) took up the cudgels against what he saw as extra-parliamentary liberalism's vacuous pursuit of 'an Englishman's right to do what he likes', to hoot, threaten, riot, as he likes (quoted in Hall *et al.* 2000: 186). The once popular notion that the 1870s saw a shift from laissez-fairism to collectivism is no longer tenable, but the tenets of laissez-faire small government were being re-examined and reforms of the civil service in the 1870s did offer the promise of greater administrative capacity. Although there was no breach in Gladstonian financial orthodoxy, an order in council of 4 June 1870 swept away nomination and patronage, and made competition full and open, encouraging a visible shift to a professionalised bureaucracy. The new liberalism emerging around 1870 in the writings of T. H. Green, in which the idea of the common good was increasingly deployed to justify a state that took on wider social responsibilities, worried more traditional laissez-faire Liberals (one response was Hebert Spencer's *The Man Versus the State* [1884] [Den Otter 1996]). The conflicts of the 1870s over trade union reform suggested that the amenability of Parliament to greater popular pressure had opened up a gap between it and the courts, which prompted sustained working-class pressure for effective union recognition through the 1870s. But there was little appetite, even amongst the new working-class voters, for any relaxation of retrenchment, and the record of the governments from 1868–85 in extending state action was modest. Extra-parliamentary pressure was often disappointed. The eclipse of influential mid-Victorian associations like the Social Science Association was symbolic. The operation of the ballot, concurrent developments in party discipline and the rise of programmatic politics, which culminated in the Midlothian campaign of 1879–80 and then Chamberlain's 'Unauthorised Programme' of 1885, all suggested that 'the age of the politically non-aligned pressure group was now over' (Roberts 2004: 242).

The preference continued to be for permissive legislation, 'the characteristic of a free people' in Disraeli's words (quoted in Hoppen, 1998: 616), like the 1875

Public Health Act or the Artisans' Dwellings Act, which empowered local authorities to engage in sanitary improvement, but did not enforce it. Even so, the balance of central-government relations was beginning to shift. The introduction of a new regime of grants in aid by Disraeli's 1874–80 Conservative government, progressively increasing in importance in the following decades, presaged a decisive shift in the 'fiscal terrain' (Price 1999: 152). The 1877 Prisons Act, which transferred both ownership and control of prisons to the Home Office, indicated the state's willingness to expropriate local government property and understanding of local government as merely an executive agency of central government. Even as central oversight intensified from the 1870s, Victorian government continued to be dominated by what has been called the 'political-diplomatic' approach, which did not seek to impose uniform technocratic solutions from the centre, but rather to deploy generalist inspectors who would work flexibly with local bodies, via persuasion and advice, to effect improvements in local services (Bellamy 1988: 117). The Local Government Board continued to lack key powers, remained entangled in a mass of detailed procedural checks without strategic direction, failed to develop technical authority in areas over which it had sight, and continued to implement statutes flexibly. The 'edifice of localism held fast' (Price 1999: 187).

Not only that, it flourished. Liberal policy in this period aimed at empowering localities to improve public morals, encouraging a surge of municipalisation and the take up of permissive powers. Led by Joseph Chamberlain, elected councillor in 1869 and mayor 1873, and supported by the local Nonconformist elite, Birmingham developed a new 'civic gospel' and a new 'municipal socialism', and although other cities were not always quick to follow suit, the scope of municipal action was steadily extended. One index of this was the spread of municipal art galleries, established or significantly augmented at Birmingham (1867, 1885), Liverpool (1877) and Manchester (1877, 1883). But its fullest expression was provided by the system established by the 1870 Education Act. The 15 years after the passing of the Act and the Cross Commission of 1885–87 were ones of dramatic and almost constant development, which saw the gradual consolidation and extension of a system of ratepayer control of education that accommodated local – often religious – conflicts, adding the power to enforce attendance in 1876 and making it compulsory in 1880. From 1870 to 1880 the combined attendance at denominational and board schools increased from 1.15 million to 2.75 million. The educational ferment also touched higher education. By the early 1870s the ancient universities were embracing what quickly became known as 'university extension lectures'. Between 1871 and 1884, 11 new provincial institutions of higher education were established. The mid-Victorian campaigns for education for women bore fruit in the formation of Girton and Newnham between 1869 and 1871, and later Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall (1879) (see Anderson's essay in this volume).

The formation of the women's colleges was part of a broader set of forces affecting women in these years. The later 1860s saw traditions of women's activism in abolition, the Anti-Corn Law League and temperance coalesce into a more vigorous, coherent and independent women's movement, associated with the formation of the National Society for Women's Suffrage (1867), the Ladies National Association (1869), the launching of the *Women's Suffrage Journal* (1870) and the career of Josephine Butler (Caine 1992). This movement offered only a limited repudiation

of Victorian gender assumptions, seeking to exploit rather than challenge ideologies of female moral superiority, but it encouraged some limited erosion of gender restrictions. The 1869 Municipal Franchise Act and the 1870 Education Act gave votes to unmarried women. A public role as elected officers became available on the new School Boards. The passage in 1870 of the Married Women's Property Act, and its extension in 1882, tempered the legal abnegation of women within marriage. The work of Octavia Hill and the Charity Organisation Society reappropriated the moral diagnosis of early Victorian social reformers to the female supervision of lady district visitors. The fast and loose 'Girl of the Period' made her appearance in the cultural criticism of the later 1860s.

The women's movement of these years remained dominated by moral and religious preoccupations, as did politics and culture more generally. Although Darwinism finally established itself as a stable force – 'what had been nebulous became specific and doctrinal about 1870' (Desmond 1997: 11) – there was no Darwinian overthrow of religion. The numbers prepared to abandon belief in the hand of the creator before the end of Victoria's reign were tiny, and large sections of Nonconformity remained happily in denial of Darwinism into the 1890s. Texts like St George Mivart's *Contemporary Evolution* (1876), whatever its scientific limitations, provided resources for those anxious to resist the ultimate implications of Darwinian naturalism. William Thompson's 1868 address *On Geological Time* reined in previous expansion of the age of the earth by drastically limiting the time during which it could have sustained life. Acceptance and familiarity deprived geology of the iconoclastic force it had once possessed. Even Darwin's own loss of faith has been traced to his failure to find effective consolation from religion at the death of his daughter Annie, rather than the impact of his evolutionary ideas (Moore 2002).

Nevertheless, the period from the late 1860s saw a weakening of the exclusionary force of religion and a more visibly tolerated rejection of the conventional forms of orthodox Christianity. The appearance from 1862–79 of the seven volumes of Colenso's *The Pentateuch* steadily developed criticism of the literal veracity of the early Biblical narratives. During the 1870s, not least via Matthew Arnold's various contributions – *St Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873) and *God the Bible* (1875) – the cultural force of Biblical criticism was extended. The implications of most of this work were as much agnostic as antagonistic. Indeed, the 1870s also saw the codification of agnosticism (a term coined by Huxley in 1869) as an intellectual position (see Cox essay in this volume). The *Fortnightly Review* had challenged the authority of organised religion; but had, as Morley conceded on retirement, perhaps only offered 'an elegant dabbling in infidelity' (quoted in Buckley 1952: 190). Institutionalised alternatives flourished, without ever achieving broad popularity. In 1867 Positivism obtained its first formal base in London, quickly taking on the character of an alternative religious sect. In this it was one of a number of non-denominational, theistic, preaching/lecturing houses that flourished in London during this period.

It is easy to portray the relations of science and religion as fundamentally antithetical in this period, and certainly figures like Huxley and Tyndall (whose 1874 Belfast Address provided a symbolic moment) sought to establish the scientific method as the only rational basis for belief, and confine religion to a narrow sphere

of faith and spirit. But the men of science's conflict was less with religion than with theology and with the clerical establishment. The result was a scientific establishment that operated in surprisingly clerical modes, and a gradual acceptance by protagonists on both sides of a stand-off of the sort articulated in William Graham's *The Creed of Science: Religious, Moral and Social* (1881), or Arthur Balfour's *Defence of Philosophic Doubt* (1879), which allocated science and religion different spheres of authority (see Lightman's essay in this volume). Meanwhile, through the informal influence of the 'X-Club' from 1864, and later via the new academic periodicals, such as *Nature* (established 1869), the new men of science were beginning to cement their organisational dominance over British science, and orchestrate calls for its institutional development. The establishment of the South Kensington Science Schools in 1871 and the various reports of the Devonshire Commission from 1872–75 spoke of a new state organisation of science. But the great hopes of the scientific community that the Devonshire recommendations would produce greater state support for science went unrealised. There was no new scientific hegemony. The two popular quarterlies, the *Popular Science Review* (1861–82) and the *Quarterly Journal of Science* (1864–85), and the monthly *Scientific Review* (1865–83), did not outlast the 1880s.

The same can be said of the aesthetic movement. In 1870 the *Saturday Review* could dismiss the importance of Ruskin for 'modern undergraduates schooled in French realism and emerging impressionism' (quoted in Stoddart 1998: 49), but to mainstream middle-class opinion, aestheticism was a controversial but marginal presence, its status summed up by the penny damages awarded to J. W. Whistler in his famous libel conflict with John Ruskin in 1877. Walter Pater's withdrawal of the notorious conclusion to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) was not a recantation, but was an acknowledgement of the need for more defensible positions against orthodox hostility. Swinburne, despite his early 'fleshliness', turned away from a self-sufficient art to moral and political purpose. William Morris, despite his social radicalism, remained convinced that 'it [was] not possible to dissociate art from morality, politics and religion' (quoted in Buckley 1952: 177). While Oxford undergraduates imbibed Pater, the wider nation was more likely to pick up Hugh Haweis' *Music and Morals*, an affirmation of the moral purpose of music that went through more than 20 editions in the 30 years after its appearance in 1871.

Organised religion, Anglican and Dissenting, remained pervasive and powerful, especially in the provinces. The later 1860s had seen a number of significant Nonconformist victories: the abolition of the compulsory payment of rates (1868), the Endowed Schools Act (1869), which was seen to breach Anglican control of endowed education, and the repeal of the University Test Acts in 1871. But these reforms were of only limited purchase, especially for plebeian radicalism. In the early 1870s the Liberation Society was perhaps at the height of its popularity, and powerful religious currents flowed into popular agitations for temperance and licensing reform, urban improvement and political reform. The national political culture remained rooted in local institutions and processes in which organised religion often played a decisive role. Inevitably, in the sudden expansion of organised football that occurred in the 1870s, parochial and congregational teams took a leading role. At the same time, popular support for the Tichborne Claimant (at its

height in the early 1870s and not fully exhausted until the collapse of the movement's paper, *The Englishman*, in 1886), and for Bradlaugh's claims for a place in parliament, especially powerful in the early 1880s, were both invigorated by longstanding traditions of popular radicalism in which anti-clericalism vied with anti-aristocratic sentiment.

From 1867 to the mid 1880s the established modes of communication were supplemented by a number of fundamental technological innovations, the first typewriter (1873), the early telephone (1876) and Edison's phonograph (see Picker's essay in this volume). The provincial evening press expanded rapidly, from 22 titles in 1872 to 85 in 1892, mostly half-penny papers aimed at more of a working-class audience. After 1872 Tillotson's Fiction Bureau incorporated the empire into a common field of fictional serialisation. The emergence of national sporting competitions was one sign of the cultural consolidation being effected by Victorian modes of communication. After the arrival of the new serious monthlies in the 1860s, *Argosy* (1865), *Tinsley's Magazine* (1867), especially the serious monthlies *Macmillan's Magazine* (1859), *Cornhill* (1860), and then the *Contemporary* (1866) and *The Fortnightly* (1865), this period was the heyday of the periodicals of general culture. But the expanding reading public, the development of mass market newspapers, and the proliferation of cheap titles engendered fresh, if hardly novel, anxieties about the sustainability of rational debate. The late 1860s also saw first attempts at more professionalised/expert periodicals, *Nature* and *The Academy* (both established 1869). In this sense, the 1870s were a halfway house to the disciplinary specialism and academic authority that increasingly characterised the late Victorian years. This transitional flavour is symbolised by the career of the Metaphysical Society, 1869–80, and its monthly debate of leading intellectuals on matters of science and religion. The society brought together a breadth of view, from Cardinal Manning to Huxley, from Henry Sidgwick to Frederic Harrison, and its petering out by the start of the 1880s reflected not just the tightening hold of academic professionalisation but also the waning of the liberal intellectual hegemony of the previous 40 years.

The compression of space was becoming not just a domestic, but a global phenomenon: 'The world is growing so small that every patch of territory begins to be looked upon as a stray farm is by a County magnate', observed *The Times* in 1874 (quoted in Darwin 2009: 66). Although diplomatic reluctance to acquire new global obligations remained, the years after 1867 brought a new recognition of the empire as a systemic whole, and a new enthusiasm for Britain as the leading global power. Ruskin, in his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1870, urged his audience to 'make your country again . . . for all the world a source of light', to found colonies and strengthen British power (quoted in Judd 1996: 121). After the successful establishment of the Canadian Confederation in 1867, the 'federal panacea almost became an imperial obsession' (Hyam 2010: 77). During the 1870s and 1880s the Royal Geographical Society's surveying and mapping provided the basis for the ever more spectacular cartographic displays of RGS meetings, simultaneously celebrating the advancement of knowledge and British power (Jones 2005). From the early 1870s, music hall repertoire celebrated British power and imperial expansion; initially in a European but by the early 1880s in an overtly imperial context: an enthusiasm coloured by more strident tones of racial superiority.

Charles Dilke's *Greater Britain* (1868) marked a shift to a more unequivocal advocacy of a British imperial mission to colonise and civilise inferior races, whose social Darwinian undertones were echoed in Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871) and Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* (1872) (Claeys 2000, Hyam 1976). By the 1870s colonial censuses used strict racial classifications. Public school ideals of 'godliness and good learning' were being rapidly displaced in the 1860s by the cult of games and manliness. The evangelical imperialism of R. M. Ballantyne was being eclipsed by the more bombastic and militaristic adventurism of Henty's imperial romances, a staple of Sunday school prize volumes (see Kennedy's essay in this volume).

Looking back in December 1867, *The Economist* noted that 'Except towards the end of 1867, foreign politics have given but little trouble' (Anon. 1867). At that point tensions between France and Germany appeared to have subsided. By 1871 the picture was very different. To the puzzlement of contemporaries, the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71 greatly complicated British international relations. Despite the shock of Prussia's victory, registered in the popularity of G. T. Chesney's 'The Battle of Dorking', first published in 1871, successive governments continued to follow the established tenets of British policy: detachment, a European concert and the Ottoman bulwark against Russia. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 reinforced the significance of the Middle East for British imperial policy, just as the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1867 set British policy in the Cape on a more aggressive path. But the transition of the concert from a club of monarchies into collectives of representative governments significantly altered the terrain, and the Congress of Berlin of 1876 showed that managing the system required much more active intervention than had hitherto been tolerated. During the 1870s Britain's traditional support of Turkey was made more difficult across the political spectrum by dismay at the Sultan's policies towards Christian communities in the Balkans. Disraeli's purchase of Suez canal shares in 1876 drew Britain further into the internal affairs of Egypt, and of its hinterland. Only with the collapse of the Khedivate in Egypt did the conditions allowing for the Palmerstonian 'imperialism of free trade' finally collapse, along with the instinctive British alignment with Turkey. The fallout from the effective takeover of Egypt in 1882 compromised Britain in Europe, driving a wedge into relations with France, and making her increasingly reliant on the goodwill of Germany, for which Bismarck extracted full recompense. By the mid 1880s, from a position as undeniably the strongest European power in the 1870s, Britain had declined to perhaps the weakest. For the rest of the century, the strategic insecurity created by the increasing naval demands of British interests in the Eastern Mediterranean placed Britain at the mercy of German diplomacy.

The economic context was also shifting. London's position as the dominant global capital market was reinforced by the post-1871 eclipse of Paris, and the arrival in London of many European financiers. Although the full extent of the change was not immediately apparent to contemporaries, with hindsight it is clear that the early 1870s also marked a turning point in economic conditions. In the wake of the publication of W. S. Jevons' *The Theory of Political Economy* (1871), the 1870s saw a widespread crisis in confidence in orthodox political economy, prompted both by reformers and political economists themselves, underpinned by the narrowing of the marginalist revolution that rejected the labour theory of value

and instead advocated a model of value derived from taste, demand and price (Poovey 2008). The perception grew that Britain was losing technological leadership and beginning to lag behind competitors. Heavy industry lost its dynamism. In coal mining, output per man peaked 1879–83. In the 1870s and 1880s Britain became part of a global agrarian system: first American wheat, and then chilled and frozen meat. In the 20 years after 1873 heavy soil arable areas of Britain once again suffered badly from cheap foreign imports. But these areas were not generally typical. Other areas and livestock farming continued to be prosperous and expansive. Nevertheless, by the end of the *entr'acte* land was beginning to lose its social and cultural consequence. The Settled Land Act of 1882 ‘marked a major symbolic turning point in the transformation of landownership into simply another form of business enterprise’ (Harris 1993: 105).

Britain retained its dominance in shipping longer than in any other sector. British yards built more than four-fifths of the total world tonnage launched in 1882. The traditional picture of a late-Victorian ‘depression’ has been successfully exploded. Although conditions became more difficult, industrial growth remained relatively constant, varying around 2 per cent per year from 1873 to 1913. Critics were aware, despite economic anxieties, of substantial increases in general spending power: from 1861 to 1881 average real wages rose by 37 per cent, and between 1881 and 1891 by a further 19 per cent (Boyer 2004). From the mid 1870s there was a slow down in the increase in the values of exports and imports. Britain’s European rivals were shifting rapidly towards protectionism, and in 1881 calls for protectionism, in the guise of ‘fair trade’, were once more being made. At the same time little if any interest was shown before 1883 in issues of poverty. There is evidence of a steady increase in nutritional levels from the 1860s to the First World War (Floud *et al.* 1990). The abolition of sugar duties in 1874 allowed workers to have jam today as well as tomorrow, and by the 1870s the ability to save money had become a feature of working-class life, underpinning a steady transformation in recreation.

In Ireland the later 1860s and 1870s were a watershed leading to a much more anti-British nationalism (Gray 2004). In the wake of the 1867 Fenian outrages, the Irish question obtained a centrality in British politics it had not achieved since the later 1840s, not least because of its crucial role in ensuring the coherence of the Gladstonian Liberal Party. Gladstone famously announced in 1868 that ‘my mission is to pacify Ireland’. Between 1867 and 1886 the emphasis was on remedial reforms, designed to meet the grievances of Irish Catholics. Unfortunately neither the Gladstonian initiatives of the early 1870s (disestablishment of the Irish Church, the 1870 Irish Land Act) or of the early 1880s (a further Land Act alongside a Coercion Act) dulled the growing demands for home rule. By the early 1880s, the dilemmas of Irish policy were intensifying tensions within Liberalism, and the election in 1885 of 86 Irish Nationalist MPs brought the tensions to a head, contributing to the Victorians’ third transitional moment.

THE LATE-VICTORIAN PERIOD

The middle years of the 1880s offer a more credible moment of watershed for the Victorian period than perhaps any other. Harold Perkin has talked of the ‘geological shift of the 1880s’, and it has been an interpretative commonplace that the years

from the early 1880s are in crucial respects 'post-Victorian' (Perkin 1989: 48). Contemporaries registered a sense of strain and dislocation that seemed more fundamental than previous observations of change, perhaps most vividly exemplified by the profound disillusion of Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After'. This sense of crisis had a number of causes. Economic difficulties appeared to be intensifying, and 1884–87 were particularly troubled years. The 'discovery' of the East End of London problem (not least via Andrew Mearns's *Bitter Cry of Outcast London* [1883]) revived early Victorian fears that modern urban society was creating structures of living that threatened social stability, that revolutionary forces might be at work 'irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface' as Henry James put it (quoted in Lucas 1971: 177). In 1885 a Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry was set to work. Pressure on agriculture continued to intensify. Lord Heneage noted that 'landowners are in such a panic that they are letting at any price and giving 30 and 40 percent reductions' (quoted in Perkin 1989: 66). Class conflict appeared to be a coming force: 'If classes are not in actual conflict, they are at least watching each other with vigilant distrust' noted Salisbury in 1883 (quoted in Shannon 1996: 51). Fenian violence reached England again: between 1883 and 1885 the Local Government Offices were blown up, and two underground stations, Victoria Station and even Scotland Yard and the Tower of London were attacked. In February 1886 there were riots in Trafalgar Square. A substantial influx of Eastern European Jews in 1886 caused an exposé of the sweated trades of the capital, anxieties reinforced and focused by the furore surrounding the publication in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1885 of 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', articles about child prostitution. W. H. Mallock's *The Old Order Changeth*, George Gissing's *Demos*, Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*, all published in 1886, reflected various anxieties about social upheaval. Richard Jefferies, *After London: or Wild England* (1885) ushered in a period of increasing popularity for dystopian views, yet in 1886 over 5 million celebrated empire at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition. The Berlin Conference (1884–85) reconstituted the terms of imperial engagement, as did, in the case of Africa, the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand reef in 1886, and the aftermath of the massacre of General Gordon's expedition to Khartoum.

In these contexts, the significant expansions of the political nation engineered by the century's third general adjustment of the political system took on a greater significance. The 1883 Political Corruption Act, with its rigid controls on election expenses, in some respects marked an even more significant watershed in the traditional politics of influence than the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872. The 1884 Reform Act extended the 1867 borough franchise to the counties, creating uniform voting qualifications for the first time. Finally, the 1885 Redistribution Act created a new map of single-member constituencies, belatedly giving the cities something like their full electoral due, while still maintaining the traditional principle of the distinction of urban and rural constituencies. In the wake of such changes, the progressives hoped for much. For Chamberlain 'The centre of power has been shifted, and the old order is giving place to the new' (quoted in Shannon 1974: 185). But while the settlement might have paved the way for the final break-up of aristocratic hegemony – the parliament of 1880–85 was the last in which the land

clearly held sway (although aristocratic dominance of the Cabinet persisted to 1905) – the contours of the political nation were unsettled rather than overthrown. Even though the reforms of 1884–85 increased the electorate by 80 per cent, accompanied by claims of ‘democracy’, they did not bring the vote even to all adult males. Indeed, by 1891 only about three of every five adult males (62.2 per cent) had the vote in England and Wales, 56 per cent in Scotland and 58.3 per cent in Ireland. There was still no vote for resident domestic servants, sons living with fathers, paupers, all those who moved frequently, and in practice (given the £10 threshold), outside London, for lodgers. All in all there was a significant shift towards mass politics, but also a reinforcement of elements of the Victorian system: the multiple franchises, the vital importance of registration, the sense of the vote as a privilege and not a right. By creating single-member constituencies the 1885 Redistribution Act brought to an end longstanding traditions of cross-party voting, put the localism of parliamentary politics under serious pressure and muted the political voice of the great provincial centres, but also created fairly homogenous working-class constituencies for the first time. Even so, constituencies were still very much autonomous republics, especially at election time. MPs were still representatives of their communities in parliament rather than their party in the provinces.

In this context what made the Reform Act for John Morley ‘one of the cardinal landmarks in our history’ (quoted by Jones 1972: 18), was that by precipitating the division over self-government for Ireland, it served as the lever of the more fundamental changes visible in the 1880s which emerged out of the remarkably sudden break up of the Gladstonian Liberal Party in 1886 in response to Gladstone’s advocacy of ‘Home Rule’. The Liberal split occurred paradoxically at a time when party disciplines were being consolidated, and was very much a function of the specific contingencies of 1886 (Harvie 1976). Local and regional associations were becoming more formal and regular. The Conservatives led the way from the later 1880s with the development of the ‘Middleton Machine’, a network of agents that supplemented the reorganised National Union of Conservative Associations and its nine provincial unions, and the Liberals followed suit, shifting from the NLF to more official bodies. As party discipline undercut the freedom of manoeuvre of individual MPs, and the local communities on which it had been based began to erode, so the politics of pressure was gradually eclipsed. At the same time, the Nonconformist conscience, which had been so much its motor, began to crumble in the face of the removal of its remaining central grievances (the 1888 Affirmation Act and the 1891 Religious Disabilities Removals Act), reorientations in theology and new approaches to social problems.

The years from 1886 were experienced by contemporaries as a period of rapid readjustment: the hollowing out and often overthrow of established patterns. As Britain moved into the 1890s, anxieties that have often been associated with a ‘fin de siècle’ mentality grew. The challenge of labour, the Decadent movement, the extension and intensification of imperial rivalries and the fiscal strain that they produced, the emergence of the ‘new journalism’ and the overthrow of longstanding cultural forms and practices, all heralded the apparent end of an era. Looking back even from the post-Great War vantage point of 1919, for James Bryce ‘living in a new world’, ‘the change seems to me to have come almost entirely in the fifteen years between 1885 and 1900’ (quoted in Harvie 1976: 218).

The dissolution of the once cohesive culture of Nonconformity was a reflection of the constant intellectual work of redefinition that marked the 1890s. A new generation of Liberal intellectuals, Hobhouse, Masterman, Hammond and Hobson, continued the move away from the simple, largely negative, mid-Victorian understanding of liberty as the absence of constraint. While retaining distance from socialism, in whose financial doctrines Liberals continued to see a recipe for indolence and pauperism, they cajoled the Liberals towards a doctrine of citizenship that shifted attention away from the exercise of freedom and towards the creation of the circumstances in which freedom could be exercised, a shift that involved greater state intervention than mid-Victorian liberalism had been comfortable with. By this time Nonconformist religious thought had created a new view of the state, more positive in its belief in the potential of government action. There was a greater acceptance of the function of taxation as means of redistribution, and hence an instrument of social policy. The need for redistributive fiscal policies was widely accepted between the introduction of Death Duties in 1894 and 1902. The problem was that Liberalism as a party remained a party of liberty and liberties: it never reconciled itself to becoming a party of state action. Even setting aside the continuing readiness of the House of Lords to demonstrate its ability to hobble the will of the elected government (as it did with Gladstone's Irish policy), Liberalism offered little, as the dismal record of the 1892–95 government indicated.

This lack of action bore little relation to the urgency of the task, although it was perhaps a reflection of a growing tendency, visible in the Jubilee celebrations of 1887, for the political classes to console themselves with the progress that seemed to have been made since the accession of Victoria, rather than to spur themselves with the scale and urgency of the task in hand. Booth's mammoth survey of social conditions in London, begun in 1886 and published in 17 volumes from 1889 to 1903, uncovered the extent of urban poverty, offering a scientific veneer to an impressionistic method standard since the 1830s (Walkowitz 1992). In the early 1880s there was still no piped water in a quarter of all the local authorities in England and Wales, and many houses in the poorer districts continued to rely on communal taps. The late Victorian city remained an unhealthy place. Deaths from infant diarrhoea were increasing steadily in the final years of the period and only declined sharply after 1900. It was not until then (perhaps 1918) that inhabitants could generally expect a reliable water supply, effective sewage disposal, and paved and sewered streets. Not that there weren't some improvements, particularly in general standards of living. By the 1890s it is possible to see significant enhancements in working-class diets. Victorian morbidity patterns dissolved as a number of characteristic Victorian diseases began to recede. Typhus was in rapid retreat from the late 1870s and had all but disappeared by 1900. 'By 1900 the old concerns of disease control and sanitary reform were well on the way to being replaced by new scientific and domestic preoccupations, by bacteriological monitoring and maternal and child welfare' (Hardy 1993: 8). At the same time the modern water closet, with single-piece basin and trap, was finally designed in a sufficiently cheap and reliable form to encourage its widespread introduction.

From the later 1880s social problems became a political issue. The strike of the Bryant and May 'match girls' in 1888, followed by strikes by gas and dock workers

in 1889, provided the spark for a brief but significant surge in union membership as the ‘new unionism’ of unskilled and semi-skilled workers caught alight. The surge of new unionism proved largely temporary, its significance primarily symbolic, ‘representing the emergence of the idea but not the reality of articulate mass consciousness’ (Shannon 1974: 221). Nevertheless the 1890s did see significant adjustments to the Victorian pattern of labour relations, a shift to sectoral agreements between employers’ organisations and unions, the spread of employers’ organisations, and new national agreements both on procedures and on wages. These years also saw the re-emergence of independent Labour politics, extending the socialist movement begun in the 1880s, and beginning to cohere into a genuine movement, not just a matter of political action, but of Labour churches, Clarion clubs and working-class associations. The election of Keir Hardie in West Ham in 1892 and the establishment of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 might have marked a decisive challenge to longstanding traditions of Lib-Labism, but what is really striking about the pre-1900 period is the continued political weakness of independent labour. The socialist parties were noisy but numerically insignificant. The failure of the ILP to win any seats in 1895 confirmed its impotence: the future of labour politics was to be in the different guise of the Labour Representation Committee after 1900.

Labour activism and socialist agitation both drew strength from the deepening sense of economic depression. It is clear that Britain was losing its price competitiveness steadily during the 1880s and 1890s, with a particularly sharp decline in the early 1890s (Magee 2004: 83). The growth of manufactured exports was falling well behind that of Britain’s competitors. In 1886 America moved ahead in steel, and in 1890 in pig iron, followed by Germany in 1893 and 1904 (although it is only really after 1895 that the British share of world iron and steel exports shrinks rapidly). The 1901 census for the first time indicated an absolute fall in employment in textiles, creating pessimistic contemporary comment. Yet, despite the re-emergence of protectionist sentiment, free trade remained a ‘fetish’, as Trentmann has it, through the 1890s. The economic troubles of the 1880s and the revised labour relations of the 1890s both reflected a shift to a new phase of economic growth, based around a ‘second industrial revolution’, in which the heavy industrial staples characteristic of the Victorian economy were superseded by light engineering and consumer goods. There was a visible shift to ‘modern’ mass production, characterised by standardised and interchangeable components, national and international markets, and large-scale industrial organisations. The 1890s, like the 1840s, saw technological change and renewed skilled labour substitution, prompting industrial conflict in engineering. This was especially apparent in the rapidly spreading bicycle industry, assembling increasingly standardised components, and in the boot and shoe industry, which switched rapidly to mass production machinery in the 1890s. At the same time there is evidence of a loss of leadership in technological innovation after 1890, and a lack of dynamism in the British economy particularly visible in emerging industrial sectors. The late-Victorian move towards consolidation, peaking between 1894 and 1903 when more than 1,000 companies worth over £70 million disappeared in mergers, was one response (Magee 2004: 80). The practice of limited liability was widely embraced, in

brewing, cycling and confectionery, for example. From 1885 to 1907 the number of British manufacturing and distribution companies quoted on the London stock exchange rose from 60 to nearly 600 (Hannah 1976: 20).

There was a similar, if less concentrated, transformation of retailing. One of its crucial elements was the Co-operative Wholesale Society, which had been growing steadily from the 1870s, and was clearly a triumph of a very Victorian vision of moral retailing. From the 1880s a more commercial and middle-class evolution occurred, typified by the opening of the Army and Navy Stores in Victoria Street, Westminster, built in 1887, the extension of Harrods (initially a grocery store), and the Oxford Street stores of Marshall and Snelgrove, Peter Robinson and John Lewis. Across the country the multiples like Boots (established in 1877, expanding rapidly in the later 1880s and 1890s), and Home and Colonial (established in 1885, with 200 stores by 1895) were reshaping the experience of shopping. By the 1890s it was clear that the commodity culture of Victorian Britain was shifting towards a culture of mass consumption, characterised, amongst other things, by mass manufacture, geographical extensions of the market and rationalisation of the organisation of production (see Freedgood's essay in this volume).

The intrusion of the multiples into established landscapes of local shopping was emblematic of a wider erosion of local distinctiveness and autonomy, especially visible in the substantial shift in the terms of the relationship between central and local government towards the former. The 1890s saw an expansion of central government bureaucracy, Labour Department of the Board of Trade (1893), Board of Agriculture (1894), Board of Education (1899). Local government came under increasing pressure. The Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894, which finally marginalised parish vestries and justices of the peace in rural government, were seen as a means of strengthening local administration and providing a means for channelling social provision through the localities. But the costs of local government were outstripping increases in total rateable value. The rate in the pound was forced up, and this put heavy pressure on landlords and shopkeepers, and intensified resistance to expanding municipal action. Before 1900 this pressure was largely deflected by the use of profits from municipal trading to subsidise rates. Trades unions like the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, which in 1871 had been a loose federation of self-help societies, was by the 1900s a robust organiser of national strikes, 'a classic example' according to Alborn, of a 'drive for national unions' (Alborn 1998: 245).

The years after 1885 brought an intensification of the revolt against Victorian cultural orthodoxies that had been emerging after 1867. One index of this was the accelerated output of Walter Pater, and even more the weight of writing about him after his death in July 1894. The 1890s were characterised by a visible embrace of the 'new'. Tendencies with roots back into the century suddenly seem to accelerate and coalesce. One sign was the growing sense of the anachronism of Victorian publishing structures. New specialist periodicals appeared to challenge the generalist monthlies, including the *Law Quarterly Review* (1884), *English Historical Review* (1886), *Classical Review* (1887) (Collini 1991: 213). Literary agents quickly established themselves and royalty payment rapidly replaced fixed price copyright sales. The introduction of linotype and monotype systems in the late 1880s and early 1890s opened up new possibilities for cheap print. Overseas

syndication expanded in the wake of the conclusion of international copyright agreements (such as the Berne Convention of 1887 and the US Chace Act 1891). The success of Macmillan's Colonial Library series in 1886 highlighted the growing importance of colonial markets. There was an 'enormous expansion' in popular magazines of miscellaneous journalism (Eliot 1994: 83). A transitional generation of 'popular' novelists appeared, including Rider Haggard, Hall Caine, Marie Corelli and R.D. Blackmore, who achieved unprecedented sales, but whose popularity rarely survived into the period after 1918. Rider Haggard was perhaps the country's best paid writer in the wake of *She* (1887), earning £10,000 a year (Waller 2006: 12). With a literary market dominated by Caine and Corelli, the 1890s were more suburban than subversive; it was the mass market and not modernism that seemed the more powerful challenge to established orthodoxies.

Bernard Porter has suggested that the position of these years on the cusp of an epochal change is revealed by a recognition of flux and possibility that gave almost all shades of opinion cause for some optimism about the future (Porter 1994). It was clear, for example, that by the 1890s the always contested patterns of Victorian gender had become decisively unstable. Tosh talks about 'the public undermining of private patriarchy during the 1880s and 1890s' (and of the 'characteristically Victorian culture of domesticity entering a new phase') (Tosh 1999: 146). The identification of the 'new woman' question in 1894 brought to a head tensions that had been emerging in the previous ten years, and generated fierce debate. Long-standing gender stereotypes were successfully challenged. Motherhood lost its status as a natural feminine capacity, and its ability to underpin feminine authority: it became a skill to be taught by experts. Victorian inhibitions began to crumble. The career of the Ladies Guides Association, established in 1888 to open up the West End to unchaperoned women, which folded in 1902 on the basis that its services were no longer really required, points to the chronological bounds of this transition. The New Women novels of the 1890s, with their essentially Victorian conventions, gave way to the 'sex novels' of the mid-Edwardian years. But as early as 1893 the huge sales of Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* demonstrated the weakened force of Victorian reticence. One of the most corrosive forces at work in this period was the bicycle. The Cyclists' Touring Club, formed in 1878, already had 21,000 members by 1886, by which time there were at least 800 clubs in the UK. But it was the development of the modern 'safety bicycle', and then the invention of the pneumatic tyre in the mid 1880s, followed by a rapid decline in production costs during the 1890s, that created the bicycle boom. By the mid 1890s there were perhaps 500 bicycle manufacturers in Britain, producing c.500,000 cycles a year. Grant Allen's *Typewriter Girl* (1897), who flees from office tedium to the freedom of an anarchist commune in Horsham by cycle, captures the unprecedented personal freedom offered by the cycle. It was easy for old Victorians like Frederic Harrison to note 'a gradual lowering of the moral tone' in the years before 1901, 'an abandonment of the higher standard of public opinion' (Harrison 1901: 4).

Care is needed here. Much of what early interpreters of the 1890s as a decade of radical change (like Holbrook Jackson, whose *The 1890s* was published in 1913), saw as markers of the new temper was confined to a narrow and indeed self-consciously *avant garde* elite, which defined itself in opposition to the dominant

tendencies of the period, and was reminded forcibly by the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde in 1895 and the eclipse of Aubrey Beardsley of its marginal status. The grip of orthodoxy slackened, but it did not let go. In art, rather than repudiating the realist impulse, the naturalism of the 1880s merely 'set higher standards of authenticity' (McConkey 2002: 133). Hence the vogue of Bastien-Lepage and French realist painting in the 1880s, and its influence within the Newlyn and Glasgow schools. Hence the survival, indeed revival, of the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite painters visible in the work of artists such as John William Waterhouse, John Liston and Frank Cadogan Cooper as well as in the formation of arts and crafts societies in London and the provinces. Likewise, as Kate Newey's study of 'Theatricality' shows, on the stage the conventions of spectacle, though given an imperial twist, survived generally unscathed. By the end of the 1890s there was a growing sense that the conventions of Victorian art produced only banality, in contrast to the ability of French impressionists such as Monet to 'see with fresh eyes' (Frederick Wedmore, quoted by Taylor 1999: 134). The double revolution of cheap mass-produced halftones, which could be printed on an ordinary letter-set press, and the instant camera robbed photography of what Benjamin described as its 'aura'. In 1880 there were only 14 photography clubs in Britain; by 1905 it was estimated that there were four million amateur photographers (Booth 1981: 14). This forced artists back to the 'autographic', personal interpretation, and new ways of representation that went beyond merely replication. This sort of shift was hinted in the success of Whistler's 1892 'Nocturnes, Marines and Chevalet Pieces' exhibition at the Goupil Gallery. By 1893 the new critics at least had, as the *Studio* put it, 'closed their Ruskins for ever' (Gillett 1990: 67). There was an ebbing away of social purpose, and in the novels of the 1890s life becomes a spectacle incapable of providing lessons.

Institutionally, religion went into retreat from the 1890s. Even organised secularism lost its impetus. During the 1890s the decline of religion was only relative to population, and such evidence of decline as there was could be treated as a temporary blip. After 1901 the decline in numbers became absolute, and it was recognised that this was a secular trend. By the mid 1890s declining ordination rates had made it clear within Anglicanism that its longstanding aim of expanding the clergy in pace with the population could not be sustained. The missionary impulse of the churches was visibly weakening. The Methodist Central Halls of the 1880s and 1890s marked the last concerted effort to reach the unchurched urban masses. During the 1890s it is possible finally to see a more general recognition of the significance of Biblical criticism, widespread discussion, even incorporation in the curricula of the theological colleges. In the wake of texts such as Charles Gore's *Lux Mundi* (1889) and A. M. Fairbairn's *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (1893) acceptance of elements of the 'higher criticism' finally spread across Nonconformity. There was no eclipse of philanthropy, but certainly a decisive weakening of its moralistic diagnosis of social ills. The Charity Organisation Society, with its emphasis on thrift and self-reliance, was increasingly isolated and visibly outmoded. In social policy redemption gave way to recovery. The state was no longer morally suspect. Structural reform by statute replaced familial intervention by volunteer.

There are signs of shifts of cultural mood, reflecting a number of national reverses during the decade, the intense depression of 1892–93, diplomatic travails and the apparent paralysis of party government. Heightened anxieties registered in the rash of invasion novels like William Le Quex's *The Great War in England in 1897* (1893) and Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1898). The language of degeneration became suddenly fashionable, reflecting a sort of (as John Tosh puts it) 'catch-all for pessimism about the birthrate, the nation's physical fitness, its mental and moral health, and its cultural vigour' (Tosh 2005: 195). During the 1890s in particular, European nationalism, imperial anxieties and scientific discoveries increased doubts about the inevitability of 'progress'. Huxley's 1893 Romanes Lecture, 'Evolution and Ethics' decisively repudiated attempts to create analogic relations between evolution in the natural world and ethical progress. The anti-progressivist implications of Darwin's theories of random selection seemed finally to be undercutting traditional Victorian optimism and system building. Wells's *The Time Machine*, with its forebodings about the extinction of mankind, also registers a more widespread rejection of the Victorian confidence in progress. Victorian investments in history depreciated on all sides. Medievalism was in full retreat by the 1890s. Efficiency trumped tradition. For Liberal commentator C. F. G. Masterman, 'the present can never take refuge behind the past' (Masterman 1901: v).

The late-Victorian period finally produced an imaginatively integrated and coherent empire for the first time. Military modes and metaphors became more common from the 1880s, even within religious circles (Boys' Brigade [1883] and the Church Lads' Brigade [1891]). In the 1890s membership of the officer corps became *de rigueur* at the public schools. The imperialist adventure yarn of G. A. Henty, the romances of Haggard and Stevenson, were championed by critics like Lang and magazines like *Longman's*. This was the golden age of the war correspondent and the war artist (Springhall 1986). In the wake of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, Victorian exhibition culture went imperial (including the Stanley and Africa Exhibition and the 'Greater Britain' exhibition of 1899). Private funds poured in to meet the cost of the Imperial Institute, established in 1887 and for a while an effective focus for campaigns for imperial federation. (Private funds could not sustain it, and it was taken into public control in 1902.) What Hobson described as the 'spectatorial lust' of late-Victorian popular imperialism (quoted in Coombes 1994: 63) – visible in the missionary exhibitions, which often like the 1890 Stanley Exhibition adopted the 'trophy' style, in which objects were presented less as artefacts in themselves and more as celebrations of conquest and acquisition – became increasingly popular. James Belich notes that in the 1880s and 1890s more than 50 voluntary associations emerged to encourage emigration to the white colonies (Belich 2009).

The year 1885 also marked the final effort to restore the 'concert system' in Europe. Initially Salisbury's diagnosis was fundamentally traditional. He believed that isolation, if it could be maintained without serious naval challenge, was infinitely to be preferred to entanglements likely to be the response to any attempt at assertion; and he had little confidence in an imperial counterweight to Britain's European decline. But from 1884 or 1885 British policy was increasingly pre-occupied with the threat of a new anti-British alignment of continental powers,

which would constitute a significant threat to British naval superiority, a pre-occupation that engendered almost perpetual ‘naval scares’ and the naval arms race (Beeler 1997), and also the more active embrace of empire as a necessary prop to Britain’s great power claims. The Berlin Conference demonstrated the intensified threat of imperial expansion in Africa and the Pacific from France and Germany, and pushed Britain into preventative annexations that quickly eroded the distinction between colonies and protectorates. An Empire of pre-emption was added to the existing commercial and settler empires. As indigenous regimes were destabilised by greater levels of European penetration, increasing resort was demanded both to the creation of new protectorates and to the use of new chartered companies, such as Rhodes’ British South Africa Company. Although attitudes to empire within government circles remained essentially unchanged, the foreign policy of all governments in the 1890s bowed reluctantly to the apparently inexorable logic of expansion in central Africa as a bulwark to Egypt. In South Africa tensions between the Cape and Kruger’s South African Republic, inflamed by conflicts over gold exploitation, produced a steady deterioration of relations that brought war in 1899. By the 1890s imperial control was steadily being extended to include law courts, policing and taxation. In Ireland the successes of the Home Rule Movement brought a new phase of sectarian polarisation, and made a consensual solution for the Irish question even more distant.

THE END OF THE VICTORIAN

As we saw at the outset of this chapter, the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 unleashed a torrent of almost apocalyptic nostalgia. Watching the queen’s cortege, Elinor Glyn felt ‘that I was witnessing the funeral procession of England’s greatness and glory’ (quoted in Hynes 1968: 17). Otherwise, as had been the case in 1837, it was the death of the monarch almost alone that gave 1901 its distinction. Apart from this, the imperial tour of Edward VII, and the continuation of the Boer War, ‘there has been little to lead us to suppose’, remarked *The Times*, ‘that future historians will concern themselves very greatly with the year 1901’ (Anon 1901: 7). Changes in electoral rules meant that, unlike in 1837, there was not even an automatic dissolution of parliament on the death of the monarch to enliven events. Even so, the cultural significance of the death of the Queen in 1901, and hence the appropriateness of this as dating the end of a historical period stretching from the 1830s, was magnified through its conjunction with a number of other events. In Arthur Ransome’s slightly telescoped recollections, ‘The sudden lurch forward in history that jerked us from the age that remembered the Duke of Wellington into the modern world’ could be dated ‘by the death of the Queen, the Jameson Raid, Mafeking Night and the sight of two Rugby masters standing on the steps of the school gateway and looking together at an early copy of the *Daily Mail*’ (Ransome 1976: 61).

Ransome was not alone in identifying the Boer War as both the occasion and in no small measure the cause of the changes occurring in the years around the death of Victoria. Although scholarly attention has inevitably focused on the 1914–18 war as the moment when for Europe as a whole the nineteenth century came to an end, for Britain, except perhaps for matters economic, the Boer War

deserves perhaps equal attention. The conservative journalist L. J. Maxse had no doubt that ‘the South African War opened a new epoch in our history’ (quoted in Green 1999: 361). The strains being created by the mounting costs of naval expenditure and imperial defence were apparent in the 1890s, but the Boer War brought them to a head. For many the wild celebrations of the relief of Mafeking lifted the lid on the seething cauldron of democracy, and demonstrated that the era of rational politics was passing. The war crystallised a sense that continental tensions, particularly the ambitions of Germany, were once again a fundamental threat to Britain’s world position, prompting the ending of diplomatic ‘isolation’ and the stoking of the Anglo-German arms race (Steiner 1977). Above all, the war convinced many of the need for greater imperial solidarity, and demonstrated that the ‘blue water’ policy of imperial defence based on naval supremacy (which in one form or other had dominated Victorian strategic thinking) was incapable of defending Britain and its empire. In foreign affairs the years from 1898 to 1907 were recognised as constituting a ‘diplomatic revolution’ for Britain, even if the motives were conservative and temporising, and the results were the postponement until the First World War of more fundamental adjustments of British military organisation and strategic thinking. In the space of a couple of years from 1895, the buttressing of Turkey was abandoned. For all their limits the Anglo-Japanese alliance (1902) and the subsequent *ententes* with France and Russia marked both a decisive abandonment of Victorian principles of the avoidance of encumbrances and a reorientation towards Europe and the threat of Germany in particular. The change was swift. In 1904 naval planning was still preoccupied with the threat from France; by 1906 it was accepted that the overwhelming likelihood was that Britain’s next war would be against Germany. The imperial conferences of 1897 and 1902, the confederation of Australia in 1901, and the formation in 1904 of the Committee of Imperial Defence demonstrate a new concern with imperial defence. These developments fed on the intensification of late-Victorian popular imperial cultures, the jingoism of the music hall (‘Britannia’s Sons shall rule the world’ [1897]), and the overt imperialism of the new middlebrow press (as in the *Daily Mail*’s [1896] designation of itself as ‘independent and imperial’ in politics). The years around 1900 saw a rush of new imperialist associations, and a flurry of imperial composition, most enduringly Elgar’s ‘Imperial March’ (1897) and ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ (1901). Against these can be set the Proclamation of the Pan-African Conference that met in London in 1900, written by W. E. B. Du Bois, which predicted that ‘The Problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colour line’ (Schneer 1999: 221; for a discussion of varieties of African Victorianism see Gikandi in this volume).

The travails of British military operations and the controversy over the policy of internment in concentration camps of the subjected Boers contributed to an acute sense of disillusionment. But it was more than just a question of mood. Differences of opinion over the justice of the war further widened the cracks in the Nonconformist base of Liberalism that had been appearing since 1886. The 1900 ‘Khaki’ election, won easily by the Conservatives, marked a significant stage in the intrusion of party machinery into the conduct of electoral politics, as candidates’ addresses and electioneering materials became increasingly stereotyped. The war cost more than all Britain’s other nineteenth-century imperial adventures

put together, and the fiscal system of the mid-Victorians finally crumbled. ‘Peace and Retrenchment are nowadays looked upon rather as dreams than realities . . . it is certain that we must be ready to defend our Empire and hold our Trade . . .’, warned the *Bankers’ Journal* in March 1900 (quoted in Schneer 1999: 89). Legacies of fiscal strain and anxiety about the state of the nation’s defences in the light of evidence of the poor health of potential recruits prompted a rhetoric of ‘national efficiency’ that breached traditional Victorian limits to state intervention. By 1902 central government expenditure was twice the level of 1894, and continued to increase thereafter, absorbing an ever greater share of GNP.

By convincing Chamberlain and many others that imperial organisation was both essential and practicable, the war also paved the way for the Unionist bid for ‘fair trade’ protectionism, which above all else shaped the politics of the Edwardian period. Significant stirrings against free-trade orthodoxy are visible from the 1870s and 1880s, but if by the early 1890s free trade was a movement in retreat, it was still the best available, and the Conservatives held back from repudiating the free trade consensus until after the retirement of Salisbury. Chamberlain’s dramatic resignation in 1903 shattered the consensus. Although free trade was overwhelmingly endorsed in the 1906 election, a number of crucial shifts around 1900 – both moves towards support for a more aggressive free trade based firmly on reciprocity, and the breaching of Peelite orthodoxies in 1901 and 1902 when the Conservative government put tariffs on coal and corn – can be taken to mark the end of the unambiguous Victorian prosecution of free trade. These years also, finally, brought a critical disturbance in the pattern of Victorian politics in the parliamentary consequences for the labour vote that followed quickly on the formation in 1900 of the Labour Representation Committee, and in the final working through of the split of the Liberal party produced by Gladstone’s ‘conversion’ to Home Rule in 1886, and the flight of the propertied to the Conservatives, which, as Hoppen has noted, ‘became emphatic only after 1905’ (Hoppen 1998: 270). At the same time Victorian cultures of participative politics fell away rapidly. After 1900 it was increasingly difficult to sell political papers and there was a shakeout of the provincial press in which the political commitment and coverage of the Victorian years was destroyed (Koss 1981).

The significance of the war was magnified because it coincided with a phase of more general transformation. The Spanish War of 1898 announced the arrival of the United States as an imperial power with global ambitions. The Boxer crisis in China in 1900 brought a new instability to the Far East, and set up the ‘grand dilemma of imperial strategy in the twentieth century: how to safeguard British interests simultaneously in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia’ (Darwin 2009: 83). There are a number of processes that cannot be tied to a specific event or enactment of 1900/01, but which nevertheless appear to have experienced a period of rapid transformation of which these years were essentially the centre. This was true of technological innovations such as the internal combustion engine, synthetic dyes, pharmaceuticals, electricity, telephony and wireless, and new industries like the early car industry. To give just two examples, in the boot and shoe industry the decade after 1895 was one of rapid technological change. In heavy chemicals, the spread after 1895 of electrolysis in the production of chlorine and caustics further undermined an already obsolescent Leblanc process. The incorporation of

unions into structures of industrial management gathered pace. Overall, the number of conciliation and collective bargaining arrangements in Britain grew from 64 in 1894, to 162 in 1905 and 325 in 1913 (Gospel 1992: 81). According to an American consular report of 1906, ‘No one who has not lived in England during the last seven or eight years can realize how great has been the awakening here nor how changed the British mental attitude is regarding new ways of doing things’ (quoted in Saul 1960: 28).

The pressure that the expense of the Boer War placed on central funding also played a fundamental part in the 1902 Education Act, which overturned the 1870 settlement and indeed the whole Victorian system of central support for denominational education. The settlement of 1899–1904 (of which the 1902 Act was only the centrepiece) fundamentally reordered the contexts of Victorian education, transforming a system mainly run by the denominations to one run primarily by the state (albeit still with relatively low levels of central direction). The 1900 Code, with its provision of a block grant, had a liberating effect, and the curriculum escaped from its longstanding emphasis on the three Rs. Significantly, by establishing compulsory ratepayer funding for denominational schools, the 1902 Act also dismantled a taboo that had restricted the development of national education from its origins. The School Boards were replaced with local education authorities. The voluntary sector was squeezed even more tightly and in some places shrank by half in the years before 1914. In this, education was just one element of a more general shift in power from the civic-minded volunteer to the professional expert (Prochaska 2006). The neutrality of the state was once more in question, even before the reforms of the 1906–14 Liberal governments effected a shift from the regulatory to the provisionary state, tilting the balance of central–local expenditure decisively and permanently in favour of the centre. Aged Gladstonians, like Frederic Harrison, looked askance on a world that had ‘lost much of the higher spirit which inspired our public and private life not more than thirty years ago’, in which ‘[t]he reek of the pothouse, the music-hall, the turf, of the share-market, of the thieves’ fence infects our literature, our manners, our amusements and our ideals of life’ (quoted in Schneer 1999: 167).

Old Victorians like Harrison were also being forced to confront dramatic changes in their sense of the possible. Just as steam had changed the dimensions of the globe in the 1840s, so electricity and the internal combustion engine were reconstituting space in the 1900s. In 1901 Marconi demonstrated transatlantic transmission; and by 1902 radio was already shifting from a problem of science to a problem of engineering. The first commercial transatlantic transmissions were being sent by 1903. Though telephones appeared in the 1880s, they developed only very slowly in the final two decades of the Victorian period; but accelerated quickly thereafter, and by 1912 some 600,000 were in service (Kern 1983). The rapid development of moving picture technologies in the later 1890s and early 1900s created the new mass leisure cinema industry with dramatic speed. With the arrival of cinema and radio the hegemony of print, which had endured for several centuries, was undermined. The pace of change in transport was more measured, but its implications were no less profound, as contemporaries perceived. From the opening of London’s Central Line in 1900, the development of suburban rail services was accelerated by the introduction of electric trains. Local transport was further

reshaped by extending tram services and the rapid exploitation of motorised road transport in the provision of bus services. Britain's first production car, the Lanchester, appeared in 1896, the same year that the regulation that any car on the public roads needed to be preceded by a man walking on foot at a speed not over four mph was repealed. The (soon to be Royal) Automobile Club was formed in 1897. The Motor Act (1902) established longstanding principles of regulation, particularly the use of number plates. The tarmac processes, patented in 1902, offered the promise of smoother and more reliable road surfaces. Production accelerated rapidly. A 1904 order, which raised the maximum unladen weight to five tonnes, prompted a bus 'boom'. Behind the dramatic inventions, less visible but no less fundamental adjustments were taking place. The decision in 1902 of the *Daily Mail* to begin printing in Manchester, with the contents being telegraphed from London each night, marked the death knell of the Victorian balance of national and provincial presses.

In less than ten years the automobile took hold, quickening imaginations and creating a new sense of vision (see E. V. Lucas, *A Wanderer in London* [1906], cited in Daniels 1993: 31), contributing to what we can see as a shift in 'scopic regime', an eclipse or abandonment of Victorian modes and their replacement by new forms of observing, visualising and representing. Here again, a few instances will have to stand for the broader processes. In social policy, Seeborn Rowntree's seminal *Poverty. A Study of Town Life* (1901), offered a rejection of Victorian modes of observation and counting for new techniques of surveying, sampling and statistical analysis. There was a rapid shift in governmental investigation from the impressionism of the Royal Commission to the sustained investigation and data collection of the departmental committee. The research university was finally coming into its own, and by the end of the period, universities established a hegemony over the production of knowledge that was to last for much of the twentieth century. New institutions, such as the National Physics Laboratory (1900), and the conversion of the South Kensington institutions into Imperial College between 1903 and 1908, signified the shift to new models of science. Certainly developments in science at the turn of the century challenged materialism and empiricism, calling into question the meaningfulness of the visible. The discovery of x-rays by Röntgen in 1895, the development of x-ray photography, itself of course a technology of vision, the conceptualisation of radioactivity by Marie Curie in 1898, and then Rutherford's reconstruction in the early 1900s of the structure of the atom, together revolutionised the physics of matter, and showed that nature was not the neat orderly system that had underpinned Victorian conceptions of the world. Arthur Symonds's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) seems to mark a decisive turning away from the rationalism and literalism of the nineteenth century. 'The human race', Arthur Balfour commented, 'without exception had lived and died in a world of illusion until the last years of the century' (quoted in Bowler 1989: 200). All helped tilt the balance away from realist projects and towards modernism's assault on what Henry James came to see as 'the fatal futility of the Fact' (quoted in Jolly 1993: 202). In the 1890s confidence in the interpretability of the object, and the impulse to encyclopaedic exhibition, gave way to new strategies: selective exhibition carefully designed to point up didactic messages. Victorian commitments to abundance in display were increasingly

interpreted as excess, and there was a shift from the exhibition of things to displays of images of things (Yanni 1999). New ideals in home furnishing promoted an abandonment of Victorian domestic display and the creation of clean, clutter-free spaces.

The twentieth century also brought with it radically different time cultures, as is made abundantly clear, despite his efforts to argue the contrary, by Wyndham Lewis' *Time and Western Man* (1927). Pierre Curie's announcement in March 1903 that radium salts constantly release heat once more expanded the range of time. At the same time there were a number of challenges that called into question the absolute view of time itself that had dominated in the Victorian period, and the emergence of more relativistic notions. Einstein's proposition of the absolute constancy of the speed of light required the abandonment of the idea of absolute time; as time and space were identified as dependent phenomena, time became an aspect of space. These theories were complex and abstruse, and can hardly be said to have transformed everyday perceptions. But they did have a significant cultural echo, above all in the emerging literature of science fiction. Photography had challenged the transitoriness of time by allowing moments to be frozen and preserved; film and phonograph encouraged further destabilisation of the apparent fixities of time by appearing to transcend it, producing and reproducing not just instances but passages of time (Doane 2002). Faced with an intensification of the objectification of time (in the service of industry, for example), modernism privileged private experience over public measurement, its characters imposing themselves on time, demonstrating what one literary critic, in the context of the novels of Henry James, describes as the 'potential infinity of the individual psychological moment' (Raleigh 1968: 52). The place of history was changing. Literary 'modernism' laid claim to radicalism in part through a deliberately intemperate repudiation. For Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *Ulysses*, 'History . . . is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake' (quoted by Lodge 1979: 550). As the razzmatazz around the Alfred millenary and the sudden popularity of historical pageants demonstrated, history could still claim a prominent place in public life. But there was also a new fragmentation: a 'change in the contents and roles of history [which] crystallized around 1900' (Melman 2006: 327).

The weakening of the British economy, visible from the 1870s, accelerated markedly at the turn of the century, although the appearances of Victorian normality were largely sustained until the cataclysm of the First World War. The rapid adoption of the slogan of 'national efficiency', whose popularity can be traced to the publication of Sidney Webb's *A Policy of National Efficiency* in 1901, was one sign of the new sense of economic crisis. Britain's place in world trade changed quickly after 1900. The sharp increase in volume of world trade, largely via the expansion of other economies, meant a significant reduction in Britain's relative importance during the Edwardian period. For example, Britain provided 85 per cent of global coal exports in 1900, but only 50 per cent in 1913. Sterling was no longer unchallenged as the international currency of last resort; instead it was increasingly required to act as a pivot between the other major currencies, a role that it was clear was coming to be beyond its capacity. The shift away from the Victorian staples was ever more apparent, and the absence of technological dynamism was brought into focus by the lack of British contribution to the

technological developments of fields such as electrical engineering. Within the space of a few years the general unions, which had struggled for 30 years to retain a foothold, laid claim to a central position in a new structure of industrial relations. Just at the point at which cultures of consumption, not just in the further articulations of the department store but also in a more general transformation in the structure of retailing, were being transformed, Victorian preoccupations with thrift and saving were being challenged by increasing concern at the problems of underconsumptionism, articulated by J. M. Robertson's *The Fallacy of Saving* and J. A. Hobson's *The Social Problem. Life and Work* (1901). In a like manner, at the very moment that anxieties about the deterioration of the urban population reached a new pitch in the reactions to the unhealthiness of recruits during the Boer War, it is now clear that Britain was in the midst of a profound demographic change, in which the grip of Victorian mortality rates was finally loosened, not least because by 1900 the ebbing of the characteristic Victorian epidemiology was turning into a more general eradication.

CONCLUSION

The Victorian period was neither stable nor homogeneous, but neither absence disqualifies its claims to be understood as a period. I have argued elsewhere that the 1830s and the years around 1900 represent broad moments of transformation that, along with the coherencies and continuities of the intervening years, help to constitute the Victorian as a meaningful historical period (Hewitt 2006). Here I have attempted to take this argument a stage further by seeking to demonstrate that within this period, moments of heightened crisis and adjustment around 1848–51, 1867–70 and 1884–86 concentrated and modulated trajectories of change in the period, in doing so creating four coherent phases of the Victorian. At one level it would appear that these divisions are fundamentally driven by political agencies, not least the punctuation provided by the parliamentary resettlements of 1829–32, 1867 and 1884–85 (perhaps inevitably, given the power of these events to shape the narrative of Westminster-centred public life), and that they are also fundamentally metropolitan rather than periodisations of global history. Even so, it can be suggested that – partly fortuitously (as in the case of the Kimberley diamonds), partly because the sense of political crisis generated by the reform agitations prised open spaces for other processes of change, and even more because the coincidence of process and event created a field of force that drew together and drew into new relationships with each other diverse processes, domestic and international – these hinge periods constituted broader moments of historical change, both thematically and geographically.

Three of the periods so formed coincide relatively conveniently with long-standing constructions of early, mid and late Victorian. The fourth addresses the often deliberate imprecision that has marked the transition from mid-to-late Victorian, and in doing so challenges conventional nomenclatures. Given the long-standing purchase of the established labels, and their at least partial fit with the different chronology proposed here, there seems no reason to reject them entirely for alternative labels, either metonymic (perhaps the ‘ages’ of Peel, Palmerston, Gladstone and Salisbury) or thematic (perhaps the ‘ages’ of crisis, equipoise, strain

and climacteric). Instead, the proposal here is to retain the conventional tripartite labels, and merely to confine late-Victorian Britain more clearly to the post-1885 period. The designation of the period from the later 1860s to the mid 1880s as the Victorian ‘*entr’acte*’ may not, as is perhaps rightly the case with such suggestions, meet with general approval, but perhaps it will at least encourage renewed attention to the nature of the milestones of the Victorian years, and to the periods or sub-periods that they help to mark. At the same time, I hope the collection of essays presented here will contribute to ongoing debates about the chronologies of the Victorian period, its characteristic ways of living and of thinking, and the extent to which these are usefully considered not just in a national, but in a global context.

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PART I

THE WORLD ORDER

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CHAPTER TWO

THE GREAT ARCH OF EMPIRE



Dane Kennedy

‘British Empire Throughout the World Exhibited in One View’ is the title of Scottish cartographer John Bartholomew Jr’s well-known and widely reproduced map, first published in *The Royal Illustrated Atlas* in 1860. This world map highlights British imperial territories in pink or light red, by this time the standard hue for cartographic representations of the British Empire. Tables on the upper left and right sides of the map list the various colonies and other dependencies that comprised the empire, divided into five regions (Europe, America, Asia, Australia, and Africa). Cartouches run across the top and bottom of the map, representing some of the empire’s many subjects. The upper panel shows encounters between British traders and settlers and North and South American Indians. The lower panel presents a cavalcade of peoples whose dress and features identify them as South Asians, East Asians, Africans, and others. A middle-class English couple stands at the center of this cavalcade, flanked by a tartan-clad Scot and a Royal Hussar cavalry officer. The message communicated by Bartholomew’s map is clear: The British Empire is a collaborative enterprise of global dimensions, its multiple subjects bound together by the benefits of British rule.

Those benefits were expressed by most Victorians in the language of liberalism. They saw their empire as a cosmopolitan force that promoted free trade and free labour, safeguarded security and legal rights to persons and property, and served the broader purposes of prosperity, progress, and civilization. How did the Victorians reconcile their faith in liberalism and its benefits with the fact that their empire had been won by conquest and was for the most part ruled autocratically? This question has attracted a good deal of attention from scholars in recent years, some of whom have suggested that imperialism was the worm in the bud of liberalism (Mehta 1999; Pitts 2005; Dirks 2006; Mantena 2010). The Victorians themselves were acutely aware of the problem their empire posed for the liberal project, but they were equally insistent on the promises liberalism offered to the empire. They recognized that imperial power placed them at risk of moral and political corruption, as Edmund Burke had famously argued as prosecutor in the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, the governor-general of India, in the late eighteenth century. They were hopeful, however, that liberalism’s humanitarian



Figure 2.1 *British Empire Throughout the World with Illustrated Peoples above & Below. 1850. © PARIS PIERCE/Alamy*

ideals and entrepreneurial energies could contain if not entirely eliminate these dangers, which they saw as emanating from the encounter with difference itself. The Victorians' engagement with empire consisted of a struggle between their faith in the family of man and a common future for humankind and their fears that primitive peoples and despotic powers would drag them down a darker path. Their ambition was to establish the empire as a great arch that could stretch across the chasm of difference and create a common weal.

* * *

The Victorians inherited an imperial dominion that had been several centuries in the making. Starting with a precarious foothold in the Caribbean and on the continent to the north in the early seventeenth century, Britain's empire assumed genuinely global dimensions by the late eighteenth century, encompassing an archipelago of highly profitable Caribbean sugar islands, a cluster of vibrant settler colonies that stretched across the entire eastern third of North America, an immensely profitable trade dominion on the Indian subcontinent, and a scattering of garrison islands across the seas. Although the successful rebellion by the

American colonists truncated the Atlantic portion of this empire, it expanded eastward as a result of the wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France (1791–1814), consolidating its control of India and extending its reach into the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, South Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere.

The opportunistic, ad hoc, and incremental way in which this empire came into existence gave it a crazy-quilt administrative structure. The loss of the American colonies had led to the abolition of the Colonial Office, its remaining responsibilities being transferred to the Home Office and then the War Office, which was renamed the War and Colonial Office in 1801. A separate Colonial Office was only restored in 1854. Through its various permutations, the principle purview of this office was the crown colonies, which comprised only a portion of the empire. India, the ‘crown jewel’ of Victoria’s empire, was governed until 1858 by the East India Company, originally a joint-stock enterprise that had mutated into a governing body with its own army and navy, operating under the oversight of a Board of Control in London. Its sway extended from the subcontinent into the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. The Indian Mutiny/Rebellion of 1857–58 forced British authorities to abolish it and assume direct control, with the India Office serving as the mediating agency between the British Cabinet and the Indian Raj. The Foreign Office, in turn, had responsibility for the protectorates, those ostensibly self-governing states whose foreign relations were in fact controlled by Britain. Many of these states were small and weak, such as the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf, but the Foreign Office also exerted considerable influence over China, the Ottoman Empire, and Latin American states like Argentina and Brazil, and after 1882 it oversaw the governance of Egypt. The Admiralty and War Office also exerted considerable independent influence over the shape and character of the empire.

From the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth century, the empire was what C.A. Bayly has termed a pro-consular despotism (Bayly 1989). It was autocratic, militaristic, and quick to crush dissent, which it invariably interpreted as sedition. British officials responded to the challenge posed by French revolutionary ideas by working to refurbish the reputations of the monarchy, hereditary elites, and the established church, associating them with patriotism, agrarian improvement, and moral order. Despite the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, slave labor remained an integral element of this empire, especially in the profitable sugar islands of the West Indies. Other forms of labor coercion thrived as well, including the impressment of sailors into the Royal Navy and the transportation of convicts to the Australian penal colonies.

By the late 1820s, however, the ground had begun to shift beneath the feet of the old regime. The first serious fissure opened up in Ireland, the main fault line between the metropolitan and colonial tectonic plates, where the campaign for Catholic emancipation breached one of the key bulwarks that had protected the traditional elites. Soon other shock waves followed, most notably the reform of Parliament in 1832 and the abolition of slavery in British colonial territories in 1834, followed in 1838 by the early suspension of the oppressive apprenticeship requirements that had been jerry-rigged to ease the transition for owners. These upheavals brought into being a new liberal imperial system, a system that would come to be characterized by free trade, free labor, legal and political rights for