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Early and Mid-Victorian Attitudes towards Victorian Working-Class Prostitution, with a Special Focus on London

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Early and Mid-Victorian Attitudes towards Victorian Working-Class Prostitution, with a Special Focus on London

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Prénom : Kathleen**

UFR Etudes anglophones

Mémoire de Master 1 Recherche anglais - 18 crédits

Spécialité ou Parcours : Civilisation Britannique

Sous la direction de Véronique Molinari

Année universitaire 2012-2013

MOTS-CLÉS

Angleterre, Londres, approches contemporaines, prostitution, femmes classe ouvrière, période Victorienne, années 1830 à 1880.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire a pour but de présenter les différentes approches qu'ont pu avoir certains Victoriens au sujet de la prostitution chez les femmes de la classe ouvrière dans le Londres Victorien. En effet, la prostitution fut un sujet qui marqua profondément la période victorienne ainsi que ses contemporains. Elle toucha plus particulièrement les femmes issues de milieux défavorisés. A partir des années 1830, des observateurs victoriens commencèrent un travail approfondi dans le but d'analyser et d'exposer ce « Grand Mal social » aussi précisément que possible. Chacun de leurs écrits sur la prostitution reflète un point de vue particulier et accentue de manière sous-jacente les conflits intellectuels et sociaux qui se déroulèrent pendant cette période.

KEYWORDS

England, London, contemporary attitudes, prostitution, working-class women, Victorian period, 1830s – 1880s.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims at presenting the different attitudes that some Victorians could have towards the issue of prostitution among working-class women in Victorian London. Indeed, prostitution was a subject that deeply marked the Victorian era as well as its contemporaries. It affected more particularly women with an underprivileged background. From the 1830s, Victorian observers started a thorough work in order to analyse and expose as accurately as possible this “Great Social Evil”. Each of their writings on prostitution reflects a particular point of view and underlines implicitly the intellectual and social conflicts that took place during this period.



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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviations

1- VD: Venereal Disease

Acronyms

1- LNA: the Ladies National Association

2- LSPYF: the London Society for the Protection of Young Females and the
Suppression of Juvenile Prostitution

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era¹ can be considered as a transitional period in British history. Indeed, England experienced a dramatic change in its industry, urban landscape, mores but also mentalities. During the 19th century, England was also marked by the drift of a great part of its rural population towards towns and cities, where jobs could be found and, by the 1850s, the census showed there were more people in the cities than in rural areas.² This phenomenon led to a huge growth of the London population – from 900 000 inhabitants in 1801³ to 5 million in 1881.⁴ However, that increasing number seemed to be also linked to the spread of poverty, overcrowded dwellings and prostitution in some parts of the city. Thus, it looked as though the Victorian metropolis had two different facets – an image prevailing both in primary and secondary sources. Indeed, a Victorian citizen could meet refined and elegant people if he walked in the luxury quarters of the West End – Regents Park or Oxford Street for instance – but if he happened to venture himself in the East End, he would certainly come across some unfortunate and poor people. This explains why Victorian London could be referred to as a fragmented city or “dual society”⁵, where its poorest population was neglected and a fair amount of working-class women had to enter prostitution to make a living.

Prostitution was a social issue in every industrialised city or town of England⁶, hence the name given to it by some Victorians: “The Great Social Evil”.⁷ We shall focus on London prostitution throughout this dissertation, for most of the Victorian observations and actions against this issue seemed to concentrate on the metropolis. As far as the Secretary of the London Society for the Protection of Young Females and the Suppression of Juvenile Prostitution⁸ J.B. Talbot was concerned, there was “no country, or city, or town, where the evil [was] so systematically, so openly, or so extensively carried on, as in England and her

¹ This period was named after Queen Victoria and corresponded roughly to the years of her reign – from 1837 to 1901.

² Keith Robbins, “La Hiérarchie des prostituées”, in *Londres 1851-1901. L'ère Victorienne ou le triomphe des inégalités*, by Monica Charlot & Roland Marx, Editions Autrement, 1990, p. 26.

³ Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *L'amour sous Victoria*, Paris : Plon, 1989, p. 15.

⁴ Roland Marx, *Jack l'Eventreur et les fantasmes victoriens*, Edition Complexe, 1987, p. 31.

⁵ Keith Robbins, op. cit. p. 16.

⁶ William Logan asked Major Greig, Chief Constables W. Henry Palin and Mr. James Wetherell the number of prostitutes in the cities of Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds. The figures stated there were 2450 prostitutes in Liverpool, 768 in Manchester and 242 in Leeds in 1870 (figures quoted by Logan in *The Great Social Evil, its causes, extent, results and remedies*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876, pp. 89-91).

⁷ See illustration from the British weekly magazine *Punch* (appendix 1)

⁸ We shall use the abbreviation “LSPYF” throughout this dissertation.

chief city”.⁹ However, the exact number of prostitutes in London remains an enigma, for the various Victorian estimations made on London prostitution differed from one another. In the 1840s, the City Authorities made an estimation of 80,000 prostitutes whereas the Metropolitan Police stated there were about 7 000 of them in London.¹⁰ A prostitute, who wrote a letter to *The Times*, took offence: “hurling big figures at us, it is said that there are 80,000 of us in London alone—which is a monstrous falsehood.”¹¹ Nonetheless, many investigators agreed on this number. For instance, Bracebridge Hemyng stated that in “1857, according to the best authorities, there were 8660 prostitutes known to the police, but [...] it scarcely does more than record the circulating harlotry of the Haymarket and Regent Street”.¹² However, the different types of Victorian prostitutes seemed to have been agreed on both by the authorities and observers. Hemyng was the first Victorian to propose an organised classification of prostitutes in Henry Mayhew’s “*London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 4”. These prostitutes could be “seclusives”, “dollymops”¹³, soldiers’ women or kept prostitutes in brothels. It must be noticed that the majority of London prostitutes were young girls who came from the working-class. As a consequence and to narrow a subject that cannot be entirely dealt with in this dissertation, we shall concentrate on prostitution among working-class women only.

As we shall deal with prostitution, it seems important to remind the reader that Victorian society attributed a double image to women. In fact, woman’s position was a central aspect of Victorian ideologies. Yet one could be confronted to the Janus-like woman: the commonly- called “angel in the house” and the “fallen woman”. They were often contrasted and opposed as two radical antitheses by observers and moralists. Indeed, the well-established model of the respectable Victorian woman was glorified and the reputation of the entire family was defined according to her own behaviour. Her first duty was to get married and it was anchored in Victorian ideologies to define a woman’s respectability and virtuosity according to the way she managed her home afterwards. Then, devotion and submission to

⁹ J.B. Talbot quoted in *Prostitution in London, with a comparative view of that of Paris and New York*, by Dr. Michael Ryan, New Works: H. Bailliere, 1839, p. 168.

¹⁰ Michael Ryan, op. cit. p. 89.

¹¹ Letter published in *The Times*, under the heading “The Great Social Evil”, London, February 24th 1858, on <<http://www.victorianlondon.org/index-2012.htm>> by Lee Jackson [Consulted: 10/03/13].

¹² Bracebridge Hemyng, “Prostitution in London”, in *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 4, by Henry Mayhew, London: Griffin, Bohn and Company, 1862, p. 213.

¹³ According to Bracebridge Hemyng, “seclusive” women were either “Prima Donnas” or kept mistresses. They all lived in luxury and had access to the high ranks of society. The difference was a “Prima Donna” had her own independence while a kept mistress relied entirely on her lovers. As for the “dollymops”, they worked as part-time prostitutes, (op. cit., pp. 215-217).

her husband were also the leading lines for a Victorian woman's success.¹⁴ But this idealisation of the womanly figure could only be effective thanks to – according to the Victorian terminology – the prostitute's "immorality" and "decadent" way of life. As the image of the "angel in the house" became the central pillar and symbol of the respectability of the family sphere, the harlot¹⁵ represented everything that was "wrong" and "immoral".¹⁶ We will see that these ideologies seemed to have an impact on the way people observed and dealt with prostitution.

From the 1830s, investigators and observers started a thorough work to describe, analyse and expose every aspect of London prostitution. We will take a peculiar interest in the way they did so and how they tried – along with authorities, institutions and middle-class women – to deal with what they considered to be a scourge. It is important to remark that all the primary sources used in this dissertation must be treated with great care, for they often lack a critical distance and tend to be biased. Thus, the interest of this dissertation is – besides the system of prostitution itself among some working-class women – to confront the different Victorian points of view and expose their actions against London prostitution.

The first part of this dissertation will allow us to have a glimpse of what many Victorian observers acknowledged as the causes that led young girls and women to prostitution. Indeed, the neglect of young women by their families, their own behaviours and neighbourhood were put forwards by male observers as elements that played an important role in their future. However, middle-class women tended to point out men's responsibility as a chief cause. This part will be completed by giving a modern insight to the problem of prostitution in Victorian London in order to try and bring to light causes that seemed to have been overlooked by the observers of the time. Then, we shall move to prostitution itself and its different actors in the second part before exposing the consequences of prostitution on women in our third part. Finally, we shall study how prostitutes were perceived by the London society. In this last part, we will first maintain our focus on the method of *laissez-faire* that was adopted by the British authorities and the various laws they eventually decided to establish in order to contain this social problem, before presenting the actions that were undertaken by societies or institution but also by investigators and women themselves to help working-class prostitutes.

¹⁴ Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman, Some Aspects of Her Life (1837-57)*, London: George G. Harrap and Co. LTD, 1953.

¹⁵ A "harlot" was the archaic term to designate a "prostitute".

¹⁶ An immoral person was someone who had sexual intercourse outside "the holiness of marriage". Prostitutes were always defined as "immoral" women by most of the investigators of the time.

PART I:

THE CAUSES OF PROSTITUTION

During the 19th century, prostitution remained a problem in many European towns and cities. In 1835, Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet led a thorough investigation in the streets of Paris and was the first man to expose so overtly the problem of prostitution.¹⁷ Some British doctors, moral reformers or social researchers used his method of investigation and applied it to England with a special focus on big cities such as London. They tried to describe London prostitution in each of its aspects – including its numerous causes.

In this part, we will expose the causes that seemed to have led working-class women to prostitution from the perspective of several Victorian observers. Then, it will be interesting to introduce some extra social and economic causes that were overlooked during the 19th century but taken into account by modern historians.

¹⁷ Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, *La Prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, Paris : J.B Baillièere et Fils, 1836.

CHAPTER 1 – The Causes of Prostitution as Described by Victorian Observers

1.1 - Neglect of parents and guardians

The “absolute neglect of children by parents”¹⁸ was a cause that appeared as central to several investigators. According to the secretary of the Society for the Protection of Young Females, J. B. Talbot, there were from twelve to fourteen thousand young girls in London who had become prostitutes because of their parents’ or guardians’ neglect.¹⁹ However, if we take into consideration the official Metropolitan Police District’s records of 1857, which stated that there were about 8600 prostitutes²⁰, Talbot's statistics appeared as an overestimation. Thus, it is difficult to know the extent of such a problem as the available data did not correspond to each other. Nonetheless, Mr Acton was not the only observer to think that some parents had a responsibility in their daughters’ fate. In 1843, observer William Logan pointed at the same issue, when he divided the causes of prostitution into several categories, among which the fact that some mothers were thought to encourage their daughters to prostitute themselves in order to contribute financially to the family’s income.²¹

In 1885, William Stead published a series of articles entitled the “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon”, in which he exposed what seemed to be – with a taste for sensationalism²² – the detailed aspects of child prostitution.²³ He described two cases of addicted parents or family members, who chose to sell their children in order to buy alcohol. However, there is no official statistic that would suggest such cases were widespread in England. Stead also exposed the cases of two children who were entrapped by their own family. In fact, Stead himself was at the origin of the deal. He employed a former prostitute, “Rebecca Jarrett”, disguised as a procuress, and whose role was to pretend to look for a virgin. Officially, Stead’s purpose was to show how easy it was to buy a girl and have sexual intercourse with her but his aim was also to shock the upper and middle-classes. The following facts were

¹⁸ William Acton, *Prostitution, considered in its moral, social and sanitary aspects, in London and other large cities*, London: J. Churchill, ed. 1857, p. 31.

¹⁹ J.B Talbot quoted by M. Ryan , op. cit., p. 171.

²⁰ Records quoted by William Acton, op. cit., p. 16.

²¹ William Logan, *An Exposure, from personal observation, of female prostitution in London, Leeds, and Rochdale, and especially in the city of Glasgow (...)*, Glasgow: G. Gallie and R. Fleckfield, 1843, pp. 11-12.

²² Journalist William Stead is often referred to as one of the founders of “sensationalism”. Yet historian Lucy Brown thought it wrong as the “concentration on the amazing and the shocking had existed long before”. To her, Stead was an “important figure in newspaper history because [he] fully understood how to use the instruments [he] conducted”, Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, “Handling the News”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 252.

²³ William Stead, *Paul Mall Gazette*, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon”, July, 1885.

exposed by the journalist in his first article.²⁴ Jarrett focused her attention on a maid of around fourteen, who lived with one of her sisters in a “house of ill fame” situated in the vicinity of Marylebone, London. Her father was dead and her mother had left London. The bargain was almost done until another of her sisters rescued her from being sold for five pounds. Jarrett was then introduced to another girl from the same neighbourhood.²⁵ William Stead underlined the fact that the mother was a “drunken” woman, who accepted to sell her daughter for a sovereign:

The woman was poor, dissolute, and indifferent to everything but drink. The father, who was also a drunken man, was told his daughter was going to a situation. He received the news with indifference, without even inquiring where she was going to. [...] The little girl, all unsuspecting the purpose for which she was destined, was told that she must go with this strange woman to a situation. The procuress, who was well up to her work, took her away, washed her, dressed her up neatly, and sent her to bid her parents good-bye. The mother was so drunk she hardly recognized her daughter. The father was hardly less indifferent.²⁶

This description portrayed these parents as drunken people, who had no interest in their daughter’s fate. Such revelations were received as a shock and revolted a great part of the London population. However, Stead’s articles must be examined and studied with care as his first aim was to stir people.²⁷

1.2 - “Born to become a prostitute”

Contemporary assumptions were also made on the fate of girls who happened to be the daughters of prostitutes. It was presumed that these girls, who lived in the brothels where their mothers worked as harlots, were most likely to become sex workers themselves. According to one of Stead’s informant – a brothel keeper – these young Victorians started working as servants from an early age and were sold as virgins or put onto the streets as soon as they attained a ‘proper’ age.²⁸ To him, some keepers “bred” these children until they were twelve or thirteen. Then, they became “merchantable” and were sold as virgins to supply males’ demand. As there is a lack of information and statistics, it is rather difficult to be positive on the proportion of such a trade. Moreover, modern historian Judith Walkowitz stated that

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ This case caused Stead a few months in jail. Indeed, Eliza Armstrong, or ‘Lily’ in the article, had been bought from her mother, “certified” as being a virgin by a midwife (woman who checked the virginity of a young girl; this category will be discussed in Part II, p. 27), drugged in a brothel and sent to France under the care of an Institution. This was orchestrated to show that a young girl could be easily sold for £5 by her parents.

²⁶ William Stead, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I*, “A child of Thirteen Bought for £5”, 6 July, 1885.

²⁷ We will study the reasons why Stead insisted so much on the sensationalist aspect of his articles in the last part of this dissertation, on p. 62.

²⁸ W. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute I*, “The Confessions of a brothel-keeper”, op. cit.

“local-government-board inspectors noted that very few girls were actually trained up to prostitution” in 1885.²⁹

However, prostitutes’ children did not seem to be the only ones to be predestined for prostitution. The various cases in which parents or relatives sold young girls to prostitution are described in detail in Dr. Ryan’s book, entitled *Prostitution in London* [...].³⁰ Ryan quoted the LSPYF’s reports to illustrate the problem. In 1837, the Committee of the Society made a list of the most uncommon cases of parents prostituting their children. They mentioned the case of “Leah Davis”, who was a brothel-keeper in London and the mother of not less than thirteen girls. Her daughters became either prostitutes or brothel-keepers in various parts of London. The Committee also referred to a father, “Ormond”, who apparently made a living thanks to his daughters’ prostitution during many years.

In 1836, the Committee also drew a list of uncommon cases of prostitution among young girls.³¹ It would be interesting to introduce a few of them in order to give a general overview of the problem that the Society tried to expose. The first two cases have in common the loss of a parent, which determined the young girl’s entrance into prostitution. The first young girl, fifteen, had been living with her father since the death of her mother. The Society stressed the fact that her father was in the habit of living on his daughter’s prostitution. Another girl of fifteen was sold by her step-mother to a house situated in the East End of London after her father’s death. Members of the Society got in touch with the girl in a hospital, where she was taken care of after having been ill-treated. Many other cases were described by the Society, still with the intention to show the impact of parents’ control and neglect on their daughters’ fate. Finally, newspapers also dealt with the subject and denounced some parents’ implication in the prostitution of their daughters. In 1843, the editor of the *London City Mission Magazine* wrote:

We heard, on undoubted evidence, of the case of a woman who, when expostulated with for her sin in keeping a bad house, and the feelings of a parent referred to as a motive to induce her to abandon her evil practices replied, ‘But all the parents do not feel as you do, for a mother came to me the other day, and asked me to take her three girls into my house. Their ages were 9, 11, and 13’.³²

²⁹ Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 28.

³⁰ The 1837 Report from the Committee of the London Society for the Protection of Young Females and Prevention of Juvenile Prostitution, quoted by Michael Ryan, in *Prostitution in London: with a comparative view of that of Paris and New York*, London: H. Bailliere, 1839, pp. 126-140.

³¹ Report from the Committee of the LSPYF presented to a public meeting at the London Tavern, May 3, 1836, quoted by Michael Ryan, op. cit., pp. 123-129.

³² The editor of the *London City Mission Magazine* in an article on Greenwich quoted by William Logan in *An Exposure* [...], op. cit., pp. 96-97.

It would be impossible to understand or explain these parents' decisions, for there is no direct testimony on the question. Accordingly, we shall only remember – not to justify but to replace the events into a certain context – that they were not part of the upper and middle-classes but came from the poorest population of London and experienced difficult living conditions in low quarters and overcrowded spaces.

1.3 - Overcrowded and poor neighbourhoods

Sexuality among the lower spheres remained a difficult subject for Victorians from the upper classes. They had a specific vision of what sexuality should be – men and women having sexual relationships within the boundaries of marriage – and were disturbed when they approached working-class people's sexuality. In any case, sexuality among the lower spheres was a matter of reprehension and intolerance for them. In fact, many observers tried to link apparent early sexual behaviours with the problem of overcrowded lodgings and squalid quarters in order to support their explanations about prostitution.

It is here important to leave our subject for a short time and describe this problem in order to understand some Victorians' studies. To a modern reader, Victorian London may still appear as a city of innovations and luxury but also as a city where the poorest populations were often packed together in the dirtiest areas. According to Philippe Chassaing, an underworld³³ was mainly situated in the narrow and dirty streets of the East End, Whitechapel and Lambeth, where the lodgings lacked sanitary services.³⁴ Chassaing gives a clear image of what Victorian London could be, when he describes the Borough – from Blackfriars Bridge at the East to Vauxhall Bridge at the West – as “insalubrious quarters” with an “accumulation of slums”.³⁵ We may find the cause of such a phenomenon in the railway mania that affected London from the 1840s. The construction of the London railway compelled a fair amount of the poorest Londoners to pack themselves in these lowest quarters of the city – such as the East End.³⁶

³³ The word “underworld” appeared during the Victoria era. According to the OED it designates “the world of criminals or of organized crime” but also the “lower level of society” since 1890 according to the online etymology dictionary, on <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=underworld&allowed_in_frame=0> [Consulted: 9/04/2013].

³⁴ Philippe Chassaing, *Ville et Violence*, “L'underworld Victorien : naissance Paradoxe d'un mythe”, Paris : Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2005, pp. 66-70.

³⁵ Ibid. pp. 23-24.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 69.

In 1851, Henry Mayhew was the first Englishman to undertake an important and meticulous investigation on the poorest populations and their working and living conditions in London. He estimated that there were “twenty-three inhabited houses for an acre and seven individuals to each house” in the London Dock, which represented 55,500 inhabitants for 8000 inhabited houses in 1841.³⁷ Mayhew described his discoveries even further in a letter sent to the *Morning Chronicle*.³⁸ According to him, young couples would to buy a cottage, when “in eight out of ten cases” it was a cottage composed of two rooms. Certainly, the poorest people from the working-class lived in small rooms and lodgings as they could not afford for larger. When children were born – more than five per family – there was no increase in the comfort of such lodgings and the beds were crammed in the smallest space. Therefore, adults and children from both sexes and all ages slept in the same room. The interest of this description with our subject is that some observers pointed at the existing problem of overcrowded lodgings as a cause of London prostitution. For Mayhew, “so long as the children are very young, the only evil connected with those is the physical one arising from crowding so many people together in what is generally a dingy, frequently a damp, and invariably an ill-ventilated apartment.” To this author, the bad instructor was “the single bed-chamber in the two—roomed cottage”.³⁹ Likewise, the Royal Commission discussed working-class lodgings in London in 1884. The Commission strongly believed that these overcrowded dwellings were at the roots of early “sexual gestures and vices”.⁴⁰

However, the following passages show the way a working-class young girl could approach sexuality and Victorian sexual mores. They were written by a prostitute who talked about her early experiences in a letter to *The Times*. We cannot be positive whether she used to live in London during her childhood or not but her experience is a good illustration of the problem that is studied in this subpart:

My parents did not give me any education; they did not instil into my mind virtuous precepts nor set me a good example. All my experiences in early life were gleaned among associates who knew nothing of the laws of God but by dim tradition and faint report, and whose chiefest triumphs of wisdom consisted in picking their way through the paths of destitution in which they were cast by cunning evasion or in open defiance of the laws of man. [...] I had larked with the boys of my own age. I had huddled with them, boys and girls together, all night long in our common haunts. I had seen much and heard abundantly of the mysteries of the sexes. To me such things had been matters of common sight and common talk. For some time I had coquetted on the verge of a strong

³⁷ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, volume 3, London: Griffin, Bohn, and Company, 1861, p. 302.

³⁸ Henry Mayhew, letter to the *Morning Chronicle*, unknown date, quoted by William Acton, op. cit., ed. 1857, p.27.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Roland Marx, op. cit., p.65.

curiosity, and a natural desire, and without a particle of affection, scarce a partiality, I lost—what? Not my virtue, for I never had any. [...] According to my own ideas at the time I only extended my rightful enjoyments. [...]⁴¹

Even if it sounds slightly curious for a working-class person to use such a “refined” language, this letter highlighted the approach a working-class girl could have towards her sexuality. It contrasted with what Victorian moralists tended to expect from a “respectable” woman, namely “virtue”, “moral” and “chastity”. Indeed, many writers – such as William Logan or Michael Ryan – described sexual behaviours from some working-class young girls as “depraved”, “immoral” and “loose”. They compared the sexual experience of a working-class woman with that of an upper or middle-class woman without taking into consideration the two completely different worlds that separated both of them. In the mind of this female writer, it was clear that she had no “virtue”⁴² and she even conceded that she was attracted to sexual intercourse. Yet as far as Parent Duchâtelet was concerned, “the complete immorality of the families, from which these women issue[d], [was] exposed. Their degradation [was] most frequently owing to the pernicious examples which [were] placed before their eyes during infancy.”⁴³ In other words, Duchâtelet explained that the fact that young girls were often packed with their parents and their ‘immorality’ had an influence on their entrance into prostitution. Bracebridge Hemyng also commented on the problem of these low quarters in the following words:

To be unchaste amongst the lower classes is not always a subject of reproach [...]. The depravity of manners amongst boys and girls begins so very early, that they think it rather a distinction than otherwise to be unprincipled. [...] Their connection begins probably at the low lodging-houses they are in the habit of frequenting. [...] The drinking, the blasphemy, indecency, and immorality that does not even call up a blush as incredible, and charity schools and the spread of education do not seem to have done much to abate this scourge.⁴⁴

When we closely study prostitution, we cannot overlook the fact that most of the children from the working classes were brought up in an overt sexual atmosphere. It is true that they met “public women” in the streets, were exposed to their parents’ sexuality and not brought up according to the Victorian standards of morality. However, Judith Walkowitz assumed that a working-class girl had her sexual initiation around the age of sixteen.⁴⁵ As a result, this contradicted the idea that young women tended to prostitute themselves because they were

⁴¹ Letter published in *The Times*, “The Great Social Evil”, op. cit.

⁴² The term “virtue” was one of the attributes of a “respectable” woman who had a total control over her desires and followed the strictness of the Victorian rules.

⁴³ Parent Duchâtelet quoted by Michael Ryan, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁴ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., p. 221.

⁴⁵ Judith Walkowitz, op. cit., p. 17.

exposed to sex at a young age. In all probability, it would be more accurate to designate overcrowded lodgings as a sign of poverty, which seemed to be the principal cause that led young women to prostitution. It is doubtful that young girls became prostitutes because they shared the same room as their parents. In fact, as soon as they got older, they had to survive by themselves and could no longer live under their parents' roof. They relieved their parents and were no longer a burden to them. Therefore, small and overcrowded lodgings, lack of sanitary services and intimacy were factors or signs that underlined the degree of poverty and not the "immorality" of working-class people.

Thus, it appeared that some investigators chose to adopt a paternalistic attitude, judged and accused a class of people for being directly responsible for prostitution rather than look at their economic and social environment. Indeed, the problem of poverty was not taken into full consideration in the remarks of the Commission, Mayhew, Hemyng or Duchâtelet.

1.4 - Miscellaneous causes

Finally, many miscellaneous causes were agreed on by the different investigators of the time in order to explain women's entrance into prostitution. As J. B. Talbot indicated, some women needed money to buy rather expensive dresses⁴⁶ and by means of material assets tried to have access to a superior social rank (material assets were considered as giving access to a superior social sphere). There was also a class of women who apparently left "respectable" situations due to bad temper and were reduced to prostitution as a consequent of their unemployment.⁴⁷ Likewise, intemperance was seen as an important cause, for addicted women needed money to buy alcohol.⁴⁸

Moreover, William Logan among others exposed the phenomenon of seduced women. To him, a great number of women working in "inns, public houses, and beer-shops" were driven to the streets because some men seduced and abandoned them.⁴⁹ Likewise, many observers pointed at the problem of servants seduced by their masters or sons in "respectable families" and abandoned to the streets⁵⁰ with a baby. That cause was, however, refuted by some historians during the twentieth century. Indeed, J. Walkowitz indicated that this

⁴⁶ J.B. Talbot, op. cit., p. 170.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Dr William Tait – former surgeon in Edinburgh – quoted by W. Logan, in *An Exposure* [...], op. cit., p.55.

⁴⁹ W. Logan, *The Great Social Evil: its Causes, Extent, Results, and Remedies*, London: Holder and Stoughton, 1871, p. 53.

⁵⁰ W. Logan, *An Exposure* [...], op.cit., p. 53.

“stereotyped sequence” could be applied to a small portion of the young women who entered prostitution.⁵¹

Procuresses were also considered as a danger for young girls. Indeed, they seemed to be one of the biggest traps for young women in London, for every observer exposed them as one of the main causes of prostitution. Yet this profession will be discussed further on in our second part⁵², for they operated as important actors in the trade of prostitution.

Even though Victorian investigators exposed more or less the same causes, it remains difficult to know their extents. The previous causes were just presented in lists – with the exception of procuresses – but never developed or linked to statistics. Although observers seemed to know the problem very well, it is true that their writings are imbued with a strong paternalistic and moralistic vision that may have influenced their observations on the whole. This explains why – as modern readers – it is difficult to rely on these writings in order to know the importance of such causes. Yet men were not the only Victorians to give their points of view on the way women were driven into prostitution. Indeed, some middle-class women also studied the issue.

1.5 - Middle-class women's point of view

Throughout the 1860s, these males' assumptions were opposed and refuted by Victorian middle-class feminists.⁵³ Indeed, Victorian women held another discourse as they accused men to be the chief cause of prostitution. According to them, men created the supply through an important demand and were entirely responsible for women's prostitution. Jane Ellice Hopkins deplored men's important demand and denounced it as the fuel of prostitution – a problem which could be ended only if men's money stopped being used to pay prostitutes.⁵⁴ As for Josephine Butler, a middle-class militant for the emancipation of women, she mainly accused well-off men to be the sole cause of prostitution, when she stated that “licentiousness [was] blasting [...] women, chiefly through the guilt of the men of the upper and educated classes”.⁵⁵ Moreover, Butler and Elmy amongst others challenged and rejected Acton's medical point of view, which stated that men's strong drives were natural and

⁵¹ Judith R. Walkowitz, op. cit., p. 18.

⁵² On p.32.

⁵³ Early feminists such as Jane Ellis Hopkins or Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy.

⁵⁴ Ellice Hopkins quoted by historian Sheila Jeffreys, in “Women and sexuality”, *Women's History, Britain, 1850-1945, an introduction*, by June Purvis, London: UCL Press, 1995, p. 195.

⁵⁵ Josephine Butler, *The Philanthropist*, “The Double Standard of Morality”, October, 1886.

biological.⁵⁶ To them, it was mainly a social problem⁵⁷ due to the society's legitimisation of men's sexual abuses on a particular class of women. Thus, that group of feminists thought that prostitution could be stopped only if men took control over their deliberate, 'loose' sexuality or drives and followed Victorian mores.

Consequently, male and female observers seemed to contradict each others. Indeed, Victorian male observers appeared as influenced by a masculine, patronising and moralistic point of view in their approach of prostitution. They often designated what seemed to be women's "loose", "irresponsible" behaviours or involuntary entrapments as the main causes but rarely insisted on men's participation. By contrast, some middle-class women pointed at men's full responsibility and considered the prostitute as the mere victim. In fact, both sides were influenced by their own ideologies, often lacking objectivity, and we need to look at some modern historians' studies to have enough distance to understand the causes of prostitution. This explains why we will expose other causes that had been sometimes mentioned by some contemporary writers but never studied in detail. In spite of the fact many Victorian observers agreed on the previous causes, it should be noted that poverty was the main cause of prostitution retained and studied by historians during the twentieth century. Indeed, historians have studied the changes in the economic and social status of British women during the 19th century and these changes had apparently an impact on working-class women's move into prostitution.

CHAPTER 2 – Social and Economic Causes

Historians' recent studies have designated women's difficult social and economic positions as the main causes of Victorian prostitution. During the 19th century, poverty remained a prevailing social problem for Victorian London. Unfortunately, many working-class women and young girls knew economic difficulties and had to accept the few alternatives offered to them

⁵⁶ William Acton was the first observer to describe the extent and solution to prostitution from a medical point of view. We shall have a special interest in his assumptions on men's demand in Part II, p. 28.

⁵⁷ Sheila Jeffreys, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

2.1 - Low paid jobs

Indeed, women had to find their place in the labour market in restricted and low paid fields. At that time, the opportunities seemed scarce in an area dominated by iron, shipbuilding, steel or coal mining⁵⁸ – in other words jobs attainable and opened mainly to men. Hence, as the young working-class girls grew older, most of them became milliners, dress makers, straw bonnet-makers, furriers, hat binders, silk-winders, tambour-workers, domestic servants, shoe-binders or even slop-women. They could also work for cheap tailors, in pastry-cook, fancy and cigar-shops, bazaar or as ballet-girls.⁵⁹ But they were soon confronted to economic and social problems, for those wearisome jobs were very lightly paid. As a consequence, they could not afford basic decent living conditions with so small earnings. For example, a servant working in a rich family earned from 12 to 18 pounds per year while a spinner earned 26 pounds and a milliner around 23 pounds a year in 1861.⁶⁰ As for a ballet-girl, she earned 23-47 pounds and had to spend most of her money for shoes, petticoats, stockings but also for food and lodging.⁶¹ Yet ‘slop-workers’ – women who sewed shirts or trousers at home – seemed to be the worst paid female workers, for they earned around 8 or 10 pounds a year.⁶² There was an important difference between those workers’ low wages and that of a lawyer and doctor, who earned 15000 pounds or 1000 pounds a year.⁶³ In point of fact, men dominated the labour market. They often exploited women and lived upon the skills of that cheap workforce. As a consequence, the poorest working girls chose the only “alternative” given to them in order to survive, that is to say prostitution. According to Bracebridge Hemyng, these women represented the “amateurs”, “female operatives” or “dollymops”⁶⁴ among the prostitutes, for they combined hours of prostitution with their main job but did not become professional sex workers. Therefore, their entry into the trade of prostitution can be apprehended as “circumstantial rather than premeditated” and “a response to local conditions of the urban job market”.⁶⁵ As we mentioned, many Victorian observers pointed at the fact that some of them did so in order to climb the social ladder or had a particular fondness for dresses and displays. However, most of these “circumstantial” prostitutes seemed to be in a distressing situation and needed money to sustain the lowest living conditions offered to them. This is how they were reduced to this part-time job.

⁵⁸ Pat Hudson, “Women and Industrialization”, in *Women's History, Britain, 1850-1945*, by June Purvis, London: UCL Press, 1995, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., p. 255.

⁶⁰ Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

⁶¹ B. Hemyng, op. cit., p. 257.

⁶² Janet Dunbar, op. cit., p. 151.

⁶³ Monica Charlot and Marx Roland, op. cit., p. 48.

⁶⁴ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Judith Walkowitz, op. cit., p. 14.

2.2 - “Surplus Women”

Likewise, Victorian England also experienced a phenomenon of “surplus women” that was particularly visible in London. Victorian observer Bracebridge Hemyng identified the problem and talked about it in these few words:

Innumerable cases of prostitution through want, solely and absolutely, are constantly occurring, and this will not be wondered at when it is remembered that 105 women in England and Wales are born to every 100 males, which number is further augmented by the dangers to which men are exposed by their avocations, and also in martial service by sea and land.⁶⁶

According to modern historian Pat Hudson, the number of these “surplus women” represented 365,159 of the British population in the 1850s.⁶⁷ This is quite an understandable phenomenon for a society that was always looking for new territories to expend its empire during the 19th century. As a consequence, many men used to leave for the colonies in order to get an opportunity and make money either as missionaries, soldiers or private entrepreneurs. Thus, the fact that there was a lack of men led part of the British female citizens to celibacy in a country that worshiped the “holiness of marriage” and the “sanctity” of the nuclear family. As a result, many spinsters had to work for a living, thus creating an important demand for scarce and low paid jobs. The consequence of this problem was an amplification of “occasional” prostitutes in the capital city. Even though these part-time prostitutes seemed important in the capital, it is impossible to estimate their number, for no data is available. In his observations on London prostitution, Bracebridge Hemyng related the case of a young woman who was faced to celibacy and unemployment. He met her near Whitechapel, London. The woman had been working as a hat-binder but lost her job. She found herself in a difficult economic situation as she had to take care of her father, who had been injured at work. She was unable to find a new employment and was driven onto the streets as a last resort:

I tried everything to get employment, and I couldn't. I ain't very good with my needle at fine needlework, and the slopsellers won't have me. I would have slaved for them though [...]; bad as they pay you, and hard as you must work for them to get enough to live upon [...]. If it don't kill me, I suppose I shall get used to it in time. The low rate of wages I received has often put it into my head to go wrong; but I have always withstood the temptation, and nothing but so many misfortunes and trials coming together could ever have induced me to do it.⁶⁸

She felt miserable about the path she was following but had no other alternative offered to her. She was certainly not an isolated case as many single young women often had to provide

⁶⁶ B. Hemyng, op. cit., p. 213.

⁶⁷ Pat Hudson, op. cit., p. 27.

⁶⁸ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., pp. 256-257.

financial support to an ill, poor relative or simply support themselves but were faced to unemployment too. They were part of the “surplus” women we have mentioned above. While trades opened to women were rather demanded and the offer low, prostitution remained a business that provided a young woman with financial security and could be looked upon as a temporary safety net.

Finally, the letter from a working-class girl – already quoted on p. 9 – could illustrate what a working woman experienced as compared to her customers:

These poor women toiling on starvation wages, while penury, misery, and famine clutch them by the throat and say, ‘Render up your body or die’. Admire this magnificent shop in this fashionable street; its front, fittings, and decorations cost no less than a thousand pounds. The respectable master of the establishment keeps his carriage and lives in his country-house. He has daughters too; his patronesses are fine ladies, the choicest impersonations of society. Do they think, as they admire the taste and elegance of that tradesman’s show, of the poor creatures who wrought it, and what they were paid for it? Do they reflect on the weary toiling fingers, on the eyes dim with watching, on the bowels yearning with hunger, on the bended frames, on the broken constitutions, on poor human nature driven to its coldest corner and reduced to its narrowest means in the production of these luxuries and adornments? [...] ⁶⁹

This letter exposes the harsh conditions that could be experienced by a poor working-class woman in a society that overlooked “the poor creatures who wrought” so expensive items for fortunate and fashionable ladies. This comparison showed that there was a sort of impassable barrier between the upper and middle-classes and the working class – a barrier that separated two isolated worlds. In their misfortune and misery, many working women were given the choice to “render up their body or die” when “fine ladies” could buy expensive dresses and be considered as “the choicest impersonations of society”. Besides, it seemed easy to designate all of these “amateurs” as immoral sinners whilst most of them did their outmost to survive in a city which simply did not make room for them. Most of these working-class women rarely exposed themselves to prostitution for pleasure. This is the other point that this letter highlights:

It is a cruel calumny to call them in mass prostitutes; and, as for their virtue, they lose it as one loses his watch who is robbed by the highway thief. Their virtue is the watch, and society is the thief. [...] Would it not be truer and more charitable to call these poor souls ‘victims’?—some gentler, some more humane name than prostitute—to soften by some Christian expression if you cannot better the un-Christian system, the opprobrium of a fate to which society has driven them by the direst straits? What business has society to point its finger in scorn, to raise its voice in reprobation of them? Are they not its children, born of the cold indifference, of its callous selfishness, of its cruel pride?

⁶⁹ Letter published in *The Times*, “The Great Social Evil”, op. cit.

Bracebridge Hemyng pointed at the fact that it was “easy to condemn, but even vice takes the semblance of virtue when it has a certain end in view.”⁷⁰ However, the woman who worked as an “occasional” was a mere harlot, a “sinner” to many Victorians, whatever her social and economic difficulties. As a matter of fact, to many Victorians they became part of the outcasts – the depraved part of the London population –. Yet the prostitute’s reality would certainly appear as more complex to the modern reader: most of them were young women, on their own, who lacked an education and were deprived of any comfortable future. They had no other choice but to work hard in low paid situations and were more likely to prostitute themselves in order to survive.

Thus, we can easily draw the outlines of the trap that was outstretched before them. Indeed, these young girls were entrapped in a vicious circle, for that ‘solution’ gave them a few more shillings as long as they worked as such but did not secure or improve their future at all. They were also exposed to venereal disease as any other prostitute – “professional” or not. In addition, if anyone discovered their second job, they could be subjected to further neglect and rejection, for being considered as “irrevocably immoral”.

As a conclusion, it appears that Victorian observers studied the causes of prostitution from a personal and not objective point of view, either to defend an ideology or a class of people. Even though their observations reflected existing facts and attitudes, it is true they often minimized or overlooked the factor of poverty, which seemed to have been an important cause of prostitution. They also studied working-class behaviours (sexual or social) from a middle or upper class’ point of view, which affected and influenced their works. This is why modern historians’ studies are useful to have a complete overview of the different causes of Victorian prostitution among working-class women. Nonetheless, male observers did not only present what they thought to be the main causes of prostitution in their books. Indeed, they also described prostitution as a trade, with its different actors and we will have a special look at them in the second part of this dissertation.

⁷⁰ Bracebridge Hemyng, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

PART II:

THE TRADE

Women and men who took advantage of prostitution were central and numerous in Victorian observers' writings. These people were described in the several observations of the time and we shall see that they played an important role in the trade of prostitution. Moreover, prostitution as a business was a fundamental aspect of London prostitution. As far as contemporary observers were concerned, it appeared that there were approximately 400,000 people associated directly or indirectly⁷¹ to the wide system of prostitution in London alone. This trade was a successfully organised and structured system – a sort of underworld with its own rules and actors – articulated around girls' and women's attributes. In this subpart, we will introduce the individuals who seemed to play – according to Victorian observers – the most important roles in the trade of prostitution.

⁷¹ Michael Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

2.1- Keepers of “houses of ill-fame”

There were three types of keepers: brothel keepers, “bawds” and keepers of houses of accommodation. The number of “bawdy” houses, brothels or houses of accommodation were checked and recorded by the Metropolitan Police in 1841.⁷² These estimations seem to be the only official survey – along with the number of prostitutes – which the British authorities made on London prostitution during the Victorian Period. On the whole, the “occupation” of those houses did not differ that much from one another. Men used them to have access to prostitutes who were expected to be uncontaminated by venereal diseases. Indeed, as soon as a woman was suspected to be infected by a disease, she was either sent to a hospital or abandoned to the streets.⁷³

The first category that shall be exposed in this paragraph is the “bawds”. They were men or women who kept “bawdy” or “immoral” houses. Their trade did not differ much from what brothel-keepers or keepers of houses of accommodation did. The only difference resided in the fact that in those houses, prostitutes could be lodged, boarded and dressed⁷⁴ but all the money they earned went directly into the bawd’s pocket.

Secondly, houses of accommodation were places where prostitutes could work⁷⁵ or men could bring young girls to have sexual intercourse. In fact, their owners did not lodge or own any prostitutes but let any man and woman use their rooms in exchange for money.

Finally, brothels were convenient, public places that men could choose to have direct access to prostitution.⁷⁶ They were open to clients who searched for extramarital or free intercourse. Those houses were mainly situated in the poor districts of the East End such as Spitalfields, Whitechapel or Ratcliff.⁷⁷ Pimps owned several girls, who either perambulated the streets in order to bring back men to their house or waited for clients inside the house. In 1839, Dr. Michael Ryan introduced some indictments of London brothel-keepers. William Sheen was a notorious pimp. He was eventually tried in 1837 and it was proved that he owned numerable houses – situated in Algar Place, Wentworth Street or Spitalfields – where he sometimes “harboured as many as thirty or forty boys and girls, between nine and eighteen”.⁷⁸ In 1837, the Committee of the LSPYF indicted John Jacobs and his wife. They had kept

⁷² According to the Metropolitan Police Records of 1841, there were 933 brothels, 1544 bawdy houses and 848 houses of accommodation, William Acton, *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects*, 2nd edition, 1870, p. 16 (appendix 2).

⁷³ M. Ryan, op. cit., p. 120.

⁷⁴ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., p. 246.

⁷⁵ Metropolitan Police Records, op. cit.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, there were around 933 brothels in 1841 where prostitutes were kept.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

⁷⁸ M. Ryan, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

several “houses of ill fame” during twenty five years in various districts of London.⁷⁹ Finally, the last case we shall mention from Michael Ryan's book concerned David Romaine, 27. He was prosecuted by the Society in 1837. Romaine had been in the habit of keeping a house for seven years in Mile-End, London. The Committee of the LSPYF described his case as such:

Three girls, of about fifteen years of age, were discovered there, living in the most abject degradation and misery, upon whom this family had been subsisting. [...] One of the three females, on a Sabbath evening, was stationed in the public street, to allure into this house the youths of the other sex who presented themselves; when a sufficient number were collected together, so as to make their united payments considerable, they were admitted to the scene of depravity which the establishment unfolded, and to which the other two females principally contributed. This practice has been repeatedly witnessed by the police, who have seen as many as twelve boys there congregated in the manner described.⁸⁰

However, young girls were not only used as prostitutes but also sold as virgins. Indeed, according to William Stead, brothel keepers could add to their earnings the sale of children or young females for the price of their virginity.⁸¹ He exposed the testimony of a former brothel keeper who affirmed that he sold “two maids for £20 each, one at £16, one at £15, one at £13 and others for less” in the lapse of seven years.⁸² Hence most of these observations tended to portray them as sexual torturers. The way investigators presented brothel keepers – insisting on their devilish and cruel personality only – is significant of the horror that Victorians felt towards such people’s work. Yet as far as Walkowitz is concerned, not every brothel keeper was as fierce with “their” harlots as depicted. She considered a brothel as a place that “operated as a family industry, run by women who needed to support their dependents”.⁸³ Thus, to a modern historian the character of a brothel keeper was not as clear-cut as Victorian moralists tended to suggest.

2.2 - Women involved in the trade

The first category of women to be discussed in this subpart is the “touters” or more commonly called by Victorian observers “the dress lodgers’ followers”. J.B. Talbot estimated that this class of women represented not less than 2,000⁸⁴ of the people who lived on the trade of prostitution in London. Dr. Michael Ryan proposed the following description:

[They were] females employed to watch prostitutes, but especially dress lodgers [well dressed women who prostituted themselves in exchange of a room], while they perambulate the streets;

⁷⁹ The Committee of the LSPYF quoted by Michael Ryan, op.cit., p. 138.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

⁸¹ W. Stead was the first one to expose so clearly this trade in *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, op. cit.

⁸² W. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* Part I, “How girls are brought and ruined”, July 6, 1885.

⁸³ J. Walkowitz, op. cit., p.28.

⁸⁴ J. B. Talbot quoted in M. Ryan’s book, op. cit., p. 194.

and whose duty it is to urge them to address passengers, and to see that they are attentive to their calling, as well as to take care that they do not run away.⁸⁵

They seemed to be either former prostitutes, who had grown old and had lost their charms, or brothel keepers. Yet Talbot was convinced that children of 8 or 9 were compelled to “work” as such before becoming prostitutes themselves at the age of 12.⁸⁶ In any case, a follower kept the same position until her death, for she was employed as the dress lodger’s guard and would not move up the social ladder or make any progress in society. Hemyng gave a developed account of the character in his report for Mayhew’s book.⁸⁷ He described a follower he had met in London – commonly called “Old Stock” – in these terms:

[...] a woman of fifty, with grey hair, and all the peculiarities of old women, among which is included a fondness for gin, [...] She wore no crinoline, and a dirty cotton dress. Her bonnet was made of straw, with a bit of faded ribbon over it by way of trimming, fully as shabby and discreditable as the straw itself.⁸⁸

This rather pejorative description illustrates what could happen to a dress lodger’s follower during the Victorian era. Moreover, Hemyng stressed the fact that this woman’s life was mainly articulated around her need for alcohol. She did not earn more than a few shillings and spent that small amount of money on gin. Moreover, she showed no sense of self-esteem, for she called herself a “drunken old bi—”. As many dress lodgers’ followers, she apparently used to be a pretty girl but became gradually a rejected, drunken woman living on others’ unpleasing job.

The second category to be dealt with in this subpart concerns the midwives described by William Stead in 1885.⁸⁹ Even though they were completely different from the “touters”, they seemed to have an important role in the trade of prostitution. Indeed, those midwives were the women who examined and certified the virginity of the girls or young women brought by a procurer before their rape.⁹⁰ They were also paid to mend or practice abortion on the victims after their rape. Stead highlighted the fact that “this repairer of damaged virgins [was] not a procuress. [...] What she [did was] to minimize pain and repair as effectively as possible the ravages of the lust which she did not create, and which she [could not] control.”⁹¹

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.183.

⁸⁷ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., p. 247-249.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 248.

⁸⁹ The midwives’ practices were first mentioned by Stead in his series of articles “The Maiden Tribute”, op. cit.

⁹⁰ The noun “rape” has been commonly used in our language since the 20th century. The nineteenth-century observers spoke of “ruin” instead.

⁹¹ W. Stead, *Maiden Tribute I*, “A dreadful profession”, op. cit.

Yet they remained an important link in the chain of prostitution as being involved in this traffic of virgins.⁹²

2.3 - *Men as clients*

How could the trade of prostitution exist without male clients' participation? In 1857, William Acton emphasised a peculiar point of view on the cause of males' large demand for prostitution. Indeed, their uncontrolled libido appeared as the chief cause of such an important demand:

We must not here lose sight of the fact that the desire for sexual intercourse is strongly felt by the male on attaining puberty, and continues through his life an ever-present, sensible want [...] This desire of the male is the want that produces the demand, of which prostitution is a result, and which is, in fact, the artificial supply of a natural demand, taking the place of the natural supply through the failure of the latter, or the vitiated character of the demand.⁹³

Acton described it as a vicious circle: a natural desire creates demand that generates supply. But when supply is important, demand is also sought:

Supply, as we all know, is regulated by demand, and demand is the practical expression of an ascertained want. [...] The want of prostitutes grows with the use of them. [...] the supply is active, so that we may almost say the supply rather than the want creates the demand.⁹⁴

To William Acton, the process was complex because it seemed that both demand and supply generated each another. For this reason, prostitution appeared as endless. Acton also gave the equation that led to "immoral" intercourse in the following terms: "the intercourse, therefore, of man or woman ought to appeal to their threefold organization of body, mind, and spirit. If the first predominates over and excludes the others, sexual desire degenerates into lust". Acton was strongly convinced that a tight control by men over their sexual desires – which he defined as natural drives that could not be prevented – by means of physical and mental exercises, could be the only effective solution. Likewise, Acton exposed another point of view in his book. The following quotation is an extract from a letter written to *The Times*:

The laws which society imposes in the present day in respect of marriage upon young men belonging to the middle class are, in the highest degree, unnatural, and are the real cause of most of our social corruptions. [...] the son must not marry until he can maintain an establishment on much the same footing as his father's. If he dares to set the law at defiance, his family lose caste, and he and his wife are quietly dropt out of the circle in which they have hitherto moved. [...] The union, which, if allowed at first, would have proved happy under worldly difficulty, has lost its brightness when postponed until middle life, even with competence and a carriage. [...] Your

⁹²Also referred to as "White Slavery".

⁹³ William Acton, *Prostitution, considered in its moral, social and sanitary aspects, in London and other large cities*, London: J. Churchill, 1857, on <<http://www.victorianlondon.org/index-2012.htm>> by Lee Jackson [consulted: 10/03/13].

⁹⁴ Ibid.

picture of marriages at thirty-five, with a Belgravian house for the happy couple, a footman in splendid uniform, and at least a brougham, is very pleasing; but there is a reverse to the canvas, and that a very dark one. How has the bridegroom been living since he attained his manhood?⁹⁵

To this writer, the Victorian rules that dictated good behaviour appeared to have, somehow, a negative impact on part of the masculine population. In that sense, “Theophrastus” and Acton minimised men’s responsibility in prostitution. Men were compelled to visit prostitutes because of strong and natural desires or the stern rules of Victorian society. In addition, they insisted on the spread of prostitution, for it seemed that a man could be confronted and influenced by prostitutes in nearly every street of London. Hence these two writers presented men as the victims of society and prostitution. Both of them accepted, justified and even excused the gentlemen’s use of prostitutes.

However both observers Bracebridge Hemyng and William Logan’s points of view diverged from “Theophrastus” and Acton’s, for they accused and did not justified young and married wealthy men’s involvement in prostitution. According to Hemyng⁹⁶, the demand did not merely come from working-class men or soldiers as many Victorians tended to suggest but also from wealthy, well-known and married men of the upper and middle-classes. Indeed, he designated with some disgust some:

well-known professional [men], wealthy merchants, MPs or rich landlord proprietors [...] sometimes these women [procuress] will write to men who occupy a high position in society, who are well-known at the clubs, and are reputed to be well off, saying that they have a new importation in their houses from the country.

In 1843, William Logan also pointed at the fact that “there [were] a number of *gentlemen* in [London] who boast[ed] in telling how many good-looking young girls they ha[d] seduced”.⁹⁷ This remark tended to suggest that wealthy men were involved in young girls’ prostitution. In addition, according to Dr. Michael Ryan “it [was] also a fact that the frightful diseases communicated by [prostitution], ha[d] not diminished the number of prostitutes, because man governed by his wants, and blinded by his passions, is more stupid and more imprudent than the brute”.⁹⁸ Even though it is obvious that not every Victorian man visited prostitutes, for they either were faithful to their wives or feared of being contaminated by venereal disease, many others overlooked the risk or found ‘tricks’ to escape venereal diseases, namely: virgins. These young girls were chosen because they were uninfected and also considered as curing

⁹⁵ Letter from “Theophrastus”, entitled “The Other Side of the Picture” to the editor of *The Times*, May 7, 1857.

⁹⁶ B. Hemyng, op. cit., p. 250.

⁹⁷ William Logan, *An Exposure* [...], op. cit., p. 39.

⁹⁸ Michael Ryan, op. cit., 1839, p. 83.

men from VD⁹⁹ with their virginity. The clientele of such “transactions” seemed to be wealthy men, who could afford to pay the high price that was asked by procurers.¹⁰⁰

Even though men’s participation was justified by some observers, they remained important actors in the trade of prostitution for others.

2.4 - *Entrappers or procures/esses*

Procurers and procuresses were often designated as a cause of prostitution. Apparently, they represented some four hundreds individuals (regardless of their sex and age, although there seemed to be more procuresses than procurers) who lived on the money they earned from decoying young females between 11 and 15 years of age in London alone.¹⁰¹ That business appeared as very lucrative, as a procuress could obtain between 20 to 100 pounds per girl¹⁰² (one must remember that most working-class women generally earned between 10 to 26 pounds a year.) They were the intermediaries to pass on children or young females to clients. Their second goal was to decoy girls in order to replace the infected or dead prostitutes of their house. Each had his own way to proceed and many tricks were found to entrap young females. For instance, a procuress employed by brothel-keepers could be sent to the country under the pretence of engaging some girls as servants or dress-makers. They were also men being paid to seduce and lure the girls in order to bring them to London when the demand was important. They entrapped their preys, letting the parents think that they were about to marry them whereas they intended to sell them to male clients. William Stead interviewed a brothel-keeper, who used to be one of those procures:

I remember one case very well. The girl, a likely "mark", was a simple country lass living at Horsham. I had heard of her, and I went down to Horsham to see what I could do. Her parents believed that I was in regular business in London, and they were very glad when I proposed to engage their daughter. I brought her to town and made her a servant in our house. We petted her and made a good deal of her, gradually initiated her into the kind of life it was; and then I sold her to a young gentleman for £15.¹⁰³

They would collect a sufficient number of girls before going back to London.¹⁰⁴ That stratagem was an easy way to lull unwary young girls as well as their families and parents. Most of the procurers however were active in the very city of London. They were dispatched

⁹⁹ Venereal Diseases.

¹⁰⁰ It is important to precise that a virgin could be sold for 100 pounds.

¹⁰¹ According to the LSPYF, quoted by M. Ryan, op. cit., p.119.

¹⁰² J. B. Talbot quoted by M. Ryan, op. cit., p.181.

¹⁰³ William Stead, *The Maiden Tribute I*, “The Confession of a Brothel Keeper”, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ The LSPYF quoted by M. Ryan, op. cit., p. 183.

all around the place, walking for instance about parks, workhouses, bazaars or next to coach stations in order to decoy as many girls as the demand asked for.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, Stead reported an interview with a former brothel keeper about the way the rapes of these young girls occurred. The woman revealed that she used to add to her revenue some money made on virgins. She openly talked about the way she entrapped young girls and unveiled the trade as such:

Did they begin willingly? Some; others had no choice. How had they no choice? Because they never knew anything about it till the gentleman was in their bedroom, and then it was too late. I or my girls would entice fresh girls in, and persuade them to stay out too late till they were locked out, and then a pinch of snuff in their beer would keep them snug until the gentleman had his way. Has that happened often? Lots of times. It is one of the ways by which you keep your house up. Every woman who has an eye to business is constantly on the lookout for likely girls. Pretty girls who are poor, and who have either no parents or are away from home, are easiest picked up. How is it done? You or your decoy find a likely girl, and then you track her down.¹⁰⁶

The woman boasted about the trade and made it rather clear that it was of common occurrence if a brothel-keeper did not want to close down his house. As Victorian statistics on children and young girls' entrapment are very hard to find, it is difficult to be positive about the authenticity of these remarks. Yet some elements overlap in many different primary sources. Indeed, the process of girls' entrapments was often described in the same way by observers but, most importantly, by the victims themselves. Generally, procurers made a first contact with the girls they had spotted, before decoying them. In fact, procured girls used to depict those pimps as pleasant persons at first until they revealed their true self. J.B. Talbot, quoted by Ryan, summarised the way this trade was performed in these terms:

The other modes by which infamous houses are supplied as death, disease, or demand requires, is, that the keepers employ agents, young women about eighteen years, to perambulate the streets, and decoy any children they may meet with, under pretence of taking them to see a relative, or going a pleasant walk, or inviting them to a theatre, or getting them a place of service. The most subtle artifices are employed on these occasions, both by day and night. [...] As soon as the children are secured, they are sold, and their ruin sealed, perhaps, by some hoary-headed debauché at an enormous price.¹⁰⁷

The following interview recorded by Bracebridge Hemyng could illustrate J.B. Talbot's sayings. Indeed, Hemyng questioned a girl of around twenty three, who seemed to have been working in a "house of ill fame" as a harlot since she was decoyed at a young age after her mother's death.¹⁰⁸ Hemyng described her entrapment as following:

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ W. Stead, *The Maiden Tribune I*, "How girls are brought and ruined", op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Ryan, op. cit., p. 182.

¹⁰⁸ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., pp. 220-221.

She was ‘ticed when she was young, that is, she was decoyed by the mistress of the house some years ago. She met Mrs. in the street, and the woman began talking to her in a friendly way. Asked her who her father was [...], where he lived, extracted all about her family, and finally asked her to tea with her. The child, delighted at the making the acquaintance of so kind and so well-dressed a lady, willingly acquiesced without making any demur, as she never dreamt of anything wrong, and had not been cautioned by her father.

In any case, it seems that the procuresses’ traps could only work thanks to the naivety, unawareness and isolation of the girls. They did not harass them in the streets for fear of being put into jail. But as soon as the girl found she had been “ruined” in the brothel, she feared the outside world’s judgement and desperately gave in to the keeper’s demands. The answer of this girl about her acceptance of her conditions was quite common amongst prostitutes: “Where was she born? Somewhere in Stopney. What did it matter where; she could tell [him] all about it if she liked, but she didn’t care.”

Every excuse and disguise was used. Moreover, procuresses could offer their “help” to foreign girls on the pretence of finding a lodging house or a job at their arrival in railway stations or would simply sit down next to young girls in public parks and start chatting with them. They went as far as factories and workhouses to decoy girls. Indeed in 1836, the Committee of the LSPYF stated that “Mary Anne Jutton” had been entrapped by a procuress as she was working in a workhouse. The woman pretended to be in need of a servant and caused Jutton’s “ruin”.¹⁰⁹ A brothel keeper used to go straight to schools in the country to watch girls or travel around the country in order to find a fine “mark”.¹¹⁰ Here is her testimony:

I remember I once went a hundred miles and more to pick up a girl. I took a lodging close to the board school, where I could see the girls go backwards and forwards every day. I soon saw one that suited my fancy. She was a girl of about thirteen, tall and forward for her age, pretty, and likely to bring business. I found out she lived with her mother. I engaged her to be my little maid at the lodgings where I was staying. The very next day I took her off with me to London and her mother never saw her again. What became of her? A gentleman paid me £13 for the first of her, soon after she came to town. She was asleep when he did it—sound asleep. To tell the truth, she was drugged.

Nothing in the trade seemed to bother them. They could cause the rape of many girls and still describe it as an act of an everyday trade. It seems we get a crucial point here. Indeed, works from the Victorian period give the reader the feeling that the trade of prostitution could be performed due to two things: first because procurers carried on their job without shame or fear of trials and secondly because young British girls kept being unaware of such traps.

¹⁰⁹ The 1836 Report of the LSPYF quoted by Michael Ryan, op. cit., p. 129.

¹¹⁰ W. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute I*, “How girls are brought and ruined”, op. cit.

Bracebridge Hemyng gave these women the opportunity to talk about their experience and meticulously reported their testimonies in Mayhew's book.¹¹¹ Thus, he recorded a sixteen-year-old local girl's story, whose entrapment happened differently from the "common" process but stressed, nonetheless, her innocence.¹¹² She visited her aunt in London in order to go to the 1851 Great Exhibition:

When I arrived [in London], aunt had a very bad cold, and couldn't get out of bed. Of course, I wanted to go about and see things, for though I didn't believe the streets were paved with gold, I was very anxious to see the shops and places I'd heard so much about. [...] I was so restless I would go by myself. I said nothing to aunt about it, and stole out one evening. I wandered about for some time, very much pleased with the novelty. The crowds of people, the flaring gas jets, and everything else, all was so strange and new, I was delighted. At last I lost myself, and got into some streets ever so much darker and quieter.

She gave an accurate account of what she saw at first as a bewildering, new place. At the same time, however, this testimony revealed the girl's naivety. Unfortunately, she soon found what crawled under this wonderful layer of "novelty". She lost herself and, not knowing it, knocked at the door of a brothel where a woman let her in. According to her, the process of her rape occurred as such:

I followed her into the room, and she pulled out a bottle of gin [...] "Market is full my dear", she added, pushing the wine-glass of gin towards me. [...] I told her I was staying with my aunt in Bank Place. [...] "Well, you'll stay with me tonight [...]" At first I protested and held out, but at last I gave in to her persuasion [...] Presently, she asked if I wasn't tired, and said she'd show me a room up-stairs where I should sleep comfortable no end. When I was undressed and in bed, she brought me a glass of gin and water hot, which she called a night-cap, and said would do me good. I drank this at her solicitation, and soon fell into a sound slumber. The 'night-cap' was evidently drugged, and during my state of insensibility my ruin was accomplished. The next day I was wretchedly ill and weak.

Apparently, the keeper trapped the young girl pretending she knew her aunt and the girl naively believed her. As a result, she became the harlot of "old men, who paid a high price for the enjoyment of her person". Thus, this testimony would tend to confirm the impression that girls' naivety and remoteness were the first determining reasons why they were easily trapped in the net of procuresses. Hemyng interviewed another girl who was not entrapped by a procurer.¹¹³ She came from Dorsetshire and arrived in London at the age of sixteen:

I was mighty pleased, you may swear, with London, and liked being out at night when I could get the chance. One night I went up the area and stood looking through the railing, when a man passed by, but seeing me he returned and spoke to me [...] asking me among other things, if I had long been in London, or if I was born there. I not thinking told him all about myself [...]

¹¹¹ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 246-247.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 240.

That testimony highlighted a point which was often pointed at by young prostitutes. The procurers collected information about the girl beforehand and tested her awareness to be sure they could have a tight clutch on her. Hemyng's witness and "her" procurers met several times before he entrapped her. One night the man pretended to feel bad and proposed to make a halt at a friend's of his, where they entered:

Somehow I didn't like the place, and not feeling all right I asked to be put in a cab and sent home. My friend made no objection and a cab was sent for. He, however, pressed me to have something to drink before I started. I refused to touch any wine, so I asked for some coffee, which I drank. It made me feel very sleepy, so sleepy indeed that I begged to be allowed to sit down on the sofa. [...] Of course I was drugged, and so heavily I did not regain my consciousness till the next morning. I was horrified to discover that I had been ruined, and for some days I was inconsolable [...] When I became quiet I received a visit from my seducer [...] He talked very kindly to me, but I would not listen to him for some time.

The girl finally gave in, was paid four pounds a week until he abandoned her to other men for cause of lassitude as, according to him, there was "always as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it". She eventually became another wanderer in the vastness of London prostitution.

The reason why, as this witness, most procured girls gave in seems obvious: a woman who lost her virginity before marriage was considered as "immoral" or "loose" character. Therefore, these young girls were "fallen human beings" according to the standards of Victorian society, regardless of the way they had their first sexual intercourse. This explains why it could be difficult for a girl to dare to go back home. Moreover, it seems unlikely that many procurers or brothel keepers would accept to release their preys.

Therefore, every testimony coincided on the same points: the entrappers spotted girls, chatted with them in a friendly way, inquiring about their family and social situation beforehand. They were often girls who had lost a parent or were foreigners bewildered by London and unaware of the traps that were laid before them. As for the pimps, they were people who adopted benevolent, friendly attitude and tone of voice. That was how they gained the girls' confidence and could draw them straight into a brothel or house of accommodation where the client awaited them.

In 1885, William Stead introduced the following account in his articles. It did not spare the details and might have been considered either pure "sensationalism" to sell the paper or a genuine description. It focused on what seemed to happen secretly in a house of accommodation and was recounted both by a midwife and an owner of a house of accommodation:

Some of the houses had an underground room, from which no sound could be heard [...] Padded rooms for the purpose of stifling the cries of tortured victims of lust and brutality are familiar enough on the Continent. "In my house," said a most respectable lady, who keeps a villa in the west of London, "you can enjoy the screams of the girl with the certainty that no one else hears them but yourself". But to enjoy to the full the exclusive luxury of revelling in the cries of the immature child, it is not necessary to have a padded room, a double chamber, or an underground room. "Here," said the keeper of a fashionable villa [...] "Here is a room where you can be perfectly secure. The house stands in its own grounds. The walls are thick, there is a double carpet on the floor. The only window which fronts upon the back garden is doubly secured, first with shutters and then with heavy curtains. You lock the door and then you can do as you please. The girl may scream blue murder, but not a sound will be heard. [...] I only will be about seeing that all is snug."¹¹⁴

Whether this description revealed facts, no one can really know. If it happened to be the truth, it was probably one of the most extreme forms of sexual torture a Victorian child could endure. Unfortunately, we do not have enough testimonies on Victorian child prostitution to push the study further. The reason for this lack of information can be double: William Stead was the first person either to dare such meticulous investigations on the subject or to mix so much reality with fantasy in his writings. The certainty is that Stead's revelation must be taken with great precaution, for, to my knowledge, he was the only Victorian investigator who wrote on child's prostitution with so vivid details and whose articles are known as marking early sensationalist journalism.

We can conclude on this part stating that, to Victorian writers, it seemed there were many people involved in the wide trade of prostitution. Thus, both women and men took advantage of working-class women and children either to earn money or for sexual intercourse. Those individuals could be indirectly involved – such as the midwives described by W. Stead – or could be central as men and keepers of houses. Although they were denounced, criticised or simply pointed at by the writers of the time, it is true that they remained unpunished and rarely labelled "immoral individuals". As J. B. Talbot noted, some procurers could be individuals "moving in the most respectable classes of Society".¹¹⁵ Thus, they still had their place in London society and were not rejected. Yet prostitutes did not have the same privileges from prostitution and society. According to Victorians' studies, they appeared as the direct victims of the trade. This is why it seems important to consider the consequences they were likely to suffer in the next part of this dissertation.

¹¹⁴ W. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute I*, "Why the cries of the victims are not heard", op. cit.

¹¹⁵ J.B. Talbot quoted by Ryan, op. cit., p.181.

PART III:

CONSEQUENCES ON PROSTITUTES

[...] I met her in the Strand, walking with another young woman. She was stouter & healthier than ever, and was dressed, not professionally as a 'lady', but quietly & well, like a respectable upper servant. She stopped with a frank smile, & shook hands; and How is this? said I again. 'Well, I've left the streets & settled down,' she said quietly. 'Married?' I asked. 'Oh no! But I'd been on the streets three years, and saved up—I told you I should get on, you know—and so I thought I'd leave, and I've taken a coffeehouse with my earnings—the Hampshire Coffeehouse, over Waterloo Bridge.' [...] Now here is a handsome young woman of twenty six, who, having begun life as a servant of all work, and then spent three years in voluntary prostitution amongst men of a class much above her own~ retires with a little competence, and invests the earnings of her infamous trade in a respectable coffeehouse, where she settles down in homely usefulness and virtuous comfort!¹¹⁶

A prostitute's life could, on few occasions, turn out to be a pleasant life when she managed to have access to an upper sphere and obtain material things – such as dresses, coaches and a convenient room. That was the case of Sarah Tanner¹¹⁷, who voluntary entered prostitution to escape from her social background and climb the social ladder. Sarah managed to step out of prostitution and set up her own business but not every young woman was as lucky during the Victorian era. As far as Henry Mayhew was concerned:

A woman, who has fallen like a star from heaven, may flash like a meteor in a lower sphere, but only with a transitory splendour. In time her orbit contracts, and the improvidence that has been her leading characteristic through life now trebles and quadruples the misery she experiences. To drown reflection she rushes to the gin palace and there completes the work that she had already commenced so inauspiciously.¹¹⁸

Through this metaphor, Mayhew intended to summarise, with a hint of poesy, his vision on the downfall of a prostitute. This image prevailed in most nineteenth observations. In a less poetic description, however, the modern reader is confronted to the general impression that working-class prostitutes experienced “slavery”, drunkenness, disease and unhappiness.

¹¹⁶ Arthur Munby, *Diary, Saturday*, 30 July, 1859, quoted on <<http://www.victorianlondon.org/index-2012.htm>> by Lee Jackson [Consulted: 10/03/13].

¹¹⁷ Kept mistresses or prima donnas could be as well off as Sarah.

¹¹⁸ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., p.214.

3.1 – *The trade of virgins*

It is not rare to come across the phenomenon of child prostitution in the different investigations of the time made on London prostitution. Recent historian J. Walkowitz, however, cautiously deals with this problem and undermines the idea that it was a widespread trade. Indeed, she thinks there was an overestimation of children as part of the “Great Social Evil”:

If most prostitutes had their first sexual encounter at or around the age of sixteen, then the throngs of child prostitutes so highly advertised during the white-slavery campaign of 1885 must be dismissed as imaginary products of sensational journalism intended to capture the attention of a prurient Victorian public. [...] Furthermore, the Rescue Society of London, which specialized in rescuing young girls and women, vigorously denied the existence of child prostitution under sixteen in London, which was supposedly the mecca for child prostitution and “five pounds virgins”.¹¹⁹

Walkowitz based her arguments on statistics provided by the London Lock Hospital.¹²⁰ Indeed, the Hospital estimated that 6.5 percent of patients were under sixteen between 1849 and 1856, a number which fell to 2.3 percent from 1857 to 1863. Yet the LSPYF stated in the second half of the 1830s that there had been around “2700 cases of disease” as a consequence of prostitution among young girls from 11 to 16 in three of the largest London hospitals.¹²¹ This shows child prostitutes were not the predominant patients in Hospitals, though it remained a problem for London investigators. Therefore, we will approach this subject in the most careful manner in order not to make the trade of virgins a generalisation.

The process of the girls’ “ruin” was often described as following the same repetitive and circular pattern. The girls were mostly lured, drugged and then raped. The interviewed former brothel keeper in William Stead’s “Maiden Tribute” casually described what was used and how she proceeded to prepare the “mark” for her client:

It is a mixture of laudanum and something else. Sometimes chloroform is used, but I always used either snuff or laudanum. We call it drowse or black draught, and they lie almost as if dead, and the girl never knows what has happened till morning. And then? Oh! Then she cries a great deal from pain, but she is 'mazed, and hardly knows what has happened except that she can hardly move from pain. Of course we tell her it is all right; all girls have to go through it some time [...] she must now do as the others do. She can live like a lady, do as she pleases, have the best of all that is going, and enjoy herself all day. If she objects, I scold her and tell her she has lost her character, no one will take her in; I will have to turn her out on the streets as a bad and ungrateful girl.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Judith Walkowitz, *op. cit.*, p.17.

¹²⁰ Victorian Lock Hospitals were hospitals that specialised in treating women infected from VD. They were considered as prison-like by many prostitutes, who, as patients, were often forcibly and violently treated.

¹²¹ Report from the Committee of the LSPYF, quoted by Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹²² W. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute I*, “How girls are brought and ruined”, *op. cit.*

This quotation stresses the extreme violence exerted on the child. The keeper would often obtain with or without strength what he looked for, as the girl would eventually give in and pursue a life of prostitution in most of the cases:

The result is that in nine cases out of ten, or ninety-nine out of a hundred, the child, who is usually under fifteen, frightened and friendless, her head aching with the effect of the drowse and full of pain and horror, gives up all hope, and in a week she is one of the attractions of the house. [...] besides, after the maid is seduced, she fills up vacancies caused by disease or drink. There are very few brothels which are not occasionally recruited in that way.¹²³

These children, whose childhood and innocence were taken away from them, experienced what looked like violent sexual torture. Thus, some young girls were raped as virgins and had to carry on in the trade as kept prostitutes for what seemed to be the rest of their life.

3.2 - *Kept prostitutes*¹²⁴

According to general observations, young kept prostitutes gradually became addicted to alcohol and remained in a life of prostitution until disease or death caught them. In 1839, Michael Ryan referred to Talbot in his book on the progression of a prostitute in the business. He had known “prostitutes as young as ten years, and as old as fifty; after which age they generally bec[a]me procuresses or brothel-keepers”. They could also become dress lodgers’ followers for many years before dying. Their life seemed to go from “swell”, well-known and admired girls, to old and drunk followers.¹²⁵

Furthermore, many observers or Societies draw a dark picture of the life of the kept prostitutes who were sent to the streets in order to find clients (these women were commonly called “dress lodgers” during the Victorian period). For instance, the Committee of the LSPYF proposed the following description in 1836:

As soon as the female is decoyed to a brothel, she is no longer allowed to wear her own clothes, which become the prize of the keeper. She is then decked with a few paltry trappings, and sent into the streets, followed by a child hired for the purpose, or by the master or mistress. Failing to bring home nightly a certain number of the other sex, she is severely punished. She is not permitted to appropriate one penny to her own use. During the day, she is compelled to wander about the house a victim of unrestrained and wanton barbarity, and frequently destitute of the common necessaries of life, unless she is employed in her usual practices. This, then, is a part of the dreadful picture of a life of prostitution!¹²⁶

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ One must not mistake kept prostitutes with kept mistresses. The first category represented those who were kept in “houses of ill fame” while the second category were women kept by wealthy men.

¹²⁵ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., pp. 247-249.

¹²⁶ The 1836 Report from the Committee of the LSPYF quoted by Ryan, op. cit., p. 130.

A dress lodger seemed to own nothing, and definitely not her own body. James Greenwood also commented on the typical life of a kept prostitute in these words:

They are bound hand and foot to the harpies who are their keepers. [...] [They] may boast of neither soul nor body, nor the gaudy skirts and laces and ribbons with which they are festooned. They belong utterly and entirely to the devil in human shape who owns the den that the wretched harlot learns to call her 'home'. [...] Splendid from her tasselled boots to the full-blown and flowery hat or bonnet that crowns her guilty head, she is absolutely poorer than the meanest beggar that ever whined for a crust [...] reduced to the lowest depths of destitution.¹²⁷

As a matter of fact, the Committee's and Greenwood's depictions overlapped on several points. They both agreed on the fact that kept prostitutes could not be in full possession of their bodies, souls and movements. They were entirely subjected to the keeper's will and remained so for the rest of their life. The following story, which was confided to a clergyman and exposed by Dr. Ryan, described the extent to which harlots lacked freedom:

[...] when I wouldn't stand it any longer, and told her (the brothel-keeper) plain that I would pay her rent and no more (nine shillings a week for a small back room) [...] She was fair enough to my face, and begged me not to leave her, flattering me and telling me she would be ruined when her customers found out that the prettiest woman had left her. That's how she quitted me, till one day, when I come home, she accused me of robbing a gentleman the night before of a diamond shirt-pin, and there was a fellow there who said he was a 'detective', and though my box was locked he had opened it before I came home, and swore that he had found the pin, which he showed me. It was all a lie. [...] But it was no use saying anything; I was the thief, they said, and I was to be taken into custody. [...] I begged the detective not to take me; I implored Mother H - to intercede for me, and she pretended to. [...] the man would take ten pounds down to hush it up. I've seen that man since; he is a 'bully' [...], but I truly believed that he was a private-clothes policeman [...]

¹²⁸

As soon as this woman decided to become autonomous and live a more "acceptable" life, her keeper invented a clever scheme in order to gain back a firm control over her.

Of course I didn't have ten pounds, nor ten shillings; but Mother H- said that she would lend the money 'on security'; and I made over to her, - sold to her, in fact, - in writing, every scrap of clothes that I had in my box and on my back. [...] I made over to her the box as well, and my watch [...]. That's how I came to be a 'dress lodger'. [...] 'you've got to work for your living now; to work for me, d'ye understand? [...] every rag you've got on is mine; ad if you say one wry word, I'll have 'em off and bundle you out'. [...] I've been a 'dress lodger' ever since, not being able to get a shilling for myself, for she takes away all I get, and besides is always threatening to strip me and turn me out, and to sue me for the five pounds I owe her'. [...] There's always a 'watcher'. Sometimes it's a woman, - an old woman, who isn't fit for anything else, - but in general it's a man [...] You're half fed, and bullied day and night, and threatened to be stripped and turned out;

¹²⁷ James Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London*, Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Company, 1869, p. 210.

¹²⁸ Michael Ryan, op. cit., p. 211-212.

and when you're at home, the watcher is generally hanging about, and he'll 'down' you with a 'one'r' in the back or side [...].¹²⁹

This testimony could be taken as an example to illustrate the sort of relationship a Victorian kept prostitute could have with her owner. This woman was treated as one of the keeper's objects. She was no longer a human being but the property of another person. Thus, she was deprived of her liberty and the right to self-determination. Lawfully, it must be remembered that a woman was the property of her husband. As a result, the keeper's attitude in the above testimony was in continuity with that established Victorian rule. In most cases, a keeper would do anything to retain a tight control over her/his property and, thus, avoid losing money. This explains why pimps often employed followers to watch and guard their prostitutes when they perambulated the streets, thus, preventing them from running away. If they attempted to escape, they would be either beaten up or put on trial for robbery. In point of fact, kept prostitutes did not pay for what they wore since they were dressed up with the brothel keeper's clothes and consequently did not own them. In 1839, Michael Ryan exposed this practice in his book:

These truly unfortunate creatures are closely watched, while walking the streets, so that it is impossible for them to escape, and if they attempt it, the spy, often a female child is hired for the purpose, or a bully, or procuress, charges the fugitive with felony, as escaping with the clothes of the brothel keeper, when the police officer on duty immediately arrests the delinquent, and takes her to the station house of his division, but more commonly gives her up to the brothel keeper, who rewards him.¹³⁰

We also mentioned the case of a young girl decoyed at an early age and interviewed by Bracebridge Hemyng – in part II, subpart 4 (page 33) when dealing with entrappers and procurers/ses. In fact, Hemyng used the word “slavery” to summarise the girl's life in the brothel:

Her life was a life of perfect slavery, she was seldom if ever allowed to go out, and then not without being watched. Why was this? Because she would “cut it” if she got the chance, they knew that very well, and took very good care she shouldn't have much opportunity. Their house was rather popular, and they had lots of visitors. [...] They [clients] paid her well, but she hardly ever got any of the money. [...] Would she stick to it till she was a stiff un'? She supposed she would; what else was there for her?¹³¹

However, B. Hemyng was not the only observer to describe a kept prostitute's life as pure slavery. As James Greenwood, an investigator, indicated, “these slaves of the London

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.179.

¹³¹ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., pp. 220-221.

pavement” were “infinitely worse off than the female slaves on a nigger-plantation”.¹³² As for Michael Ryan, he perceived it as clearly “inhuman” when he stated:

This inhuman and infamous practice is of nightly occurrence in this metropolis. When the forlorn unfortunate wretch returns to her infamous abode, she is maltreated, and kept nearly naked during the day, so that she cannot attempt to run away; she is often half starved, and at night again sent into the streets, as often as she is disengaged; while all the money she receives goes to her keeper, whether male or female.¹³³

To many observers, the extent of such treatments and living conditions seemed to be an everyday occurrence in a kept prostitute’s life.

In addition, a kept prostitute could also change houses. This process seemed common for women who worked with keepers owning several houses. We have already mentioned the case of a girl who inadvertently entrapped herself in a brothel while she was visiting London on her own.¹³⁴ In her interview with B. Hemyng, she described the way a prostitute could move from one house to another:

[...] as she [the keeper] has no more than one house, I am occasionally shifted from one to another. The reason of this is very simple. Suppose the bawd has a house in St. James’s and one in Portland Place. When I am known to the habitués of St. James’s, I am sent as something new to Portland Place, and so on.¹³⁵

By contrast, writer William Logan reflected on the problem in a more direct manner: “girls soon [came] down from first-class houses to the second, then to the third, then down to the situation of a servant in one of their houses, and finally, to the grave!”¹³⁶ What can be stated thanks to these two observations is the near impossibility for these kept prostitutes to forge links with other women. They were also deprived of physical and geographical marks as well as human relationships with the outside world that could have made their condition easier to bear and an escape possible.

As a consequence of ill-treatments, “slavery” or disrespect over their person, prostitutes would often find relief in alcohol, which appeared as the only virtual way to escape from mental pain.

¹³² James Greenwood, op. cit., p. 210.

¹³³ Michael Ryan, op. cit. p.179.

¹³⁴ Part II, subpart 4, page 33.

¹³⁵ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., pp. 220-221.

¹³⁶ William Logan, *An Exposure* [...], op. cit., p.27.

3.3 - Drunkness

Morality and virtue were important values in Victorians' minds. As soon as a woman diverted from the "proper" path, her return among "respectable" people was impossible, for she remained a "fallen woman" ever after. Therefore, a "harlot" would have a terrible time finding a position in society outside the trade of prostitution. In addition, the vision that prostitutes had of themselves was influenced by the general moralistic Victorian point of view. They strongly believed what their contemporaries said about them – that they were "immoral", "wretched" and "degraded" women. Thus, most of the London sex workers were hampered by such visions – fearing to be rejected or judged – and remained in their uncomfortable but seemingly unavoidable position. They seemed to be enslaved in a life of misery from which no escape was possible. The only solution that these women often found was to get drunk.

Although alcoholism was considered as a cause of prostitution by some observers¹³⁷, J.B. Talbot observed it as one of its numerous consequences. Indeed, he stated that many prostitutes had:

[...] recourse to strong liquors to drown remorse and shame, and expel from their mind all uneasy feelings regarding their awful situation. The mental agony which many of them experience[d] in their sober moments [was] so afflicting and intolerable, that they [were] glad to intoxicate themselves in order to obtain a moment's ease... The remedy of intoxication [was] again prescribed [...] as the only cure for low spirits. The first month of their wicked life of prostitution [was] thus spent in continued drunkenness and habits of dissipation [were] formed before they arrive[d] at a sense of their miserable situation.¹³⁸

It seems undeniable that drink was entirely part of the problem of prostitution, since most prostitutes drank over and over in order to deal with their "miserable situation". Therefore, it appears hardly as a cause of prostitution but more as a source of relief for prostitutes. Alcohol helped working-class women to carry on their life as prostitutes and prevented many of them from committing suicide.

In point of fact, suicide among prostitutes was rarely referred to by Victorian observers. Nonetheless, Dr. Michael Ryan quoted the 1837 report from the Committee of the LSPYF, in which the case of prostitutes' suicides was exposed. Mary Davis, 25, was the keeper of a notorious house in the district of Stepney, London. It was proved that two of her girls drowned themselves due to bad treatment.¹³⁹ The small number of available references

¹³⁷ As mentioned in the first part of this essay, on p. 17.

¹³⁸ J.B. Talbot quoted by William Logan, in *An Exposure* [...], op. cit., pp. 55-56.

¹³⁹ The 1837 Report from the LSPYF, quoted by M. Ryan, op. cit., p. 140.

made on the suicide of harlots among primary sources may either reflect a lack of information or the fact that more women tended to opt for other solutions – such as drink – to relieve their consciousness and distress.

3.4 – *Venereal diseases*

Another factor appears as an important consequence of prostitution, namely: venereal diseases.¹⁴⁰ As observer Bracebridge Hemyng pointed out, because of the effects such untreated diseases had on their physical appearance, some prostitutes became “park women”.¹⁴¹ According to him, that was the worst situation in which a woman could be driven to. Indeed, park women were “unsound, and by their appearance utterly incapacitated from practising their profession where the gas-lamps would expose the defects in their personal appearance, and the shabbiness of their ancient and dilapidated attire”.¹⁴² Therefore, they found shelter in parks, wearing veils as most of them were attacked by diseases and had to dissimulate “dilapidated” features. As Hemyng explained it in his essay, he actually met a park woman in Hyde Park. She used to be the daughter of a curate in Gloucester but soon became a financial burden for her family and went to town as a governess. Apparently, this woman had been seduced and abandoned by two different men.¹⁴³ She did not dare going back home for fear of being rejected:

It was too late now to go home, and I was driven to a life of prostitution, not because I had a liking for it, but as a means of getting enough money to live upon. For ten years I lived first with one man then with another, until at last I was infected with a disease, of which I did not know the evil effects if neglected. The disastrous consequence of that neglect is only too apparent now. You will be disgusted, when I tell you that it attacked my face, and ruined my features to such an extent that I am hideous to look upon, and should be noticed by no one if I frequented those places where women of my class most congregate; indeed, I should be driven away with curses and execrations.¹⁴⁴

She overlooked her disease, apparently unaware of its consequences. Indeed many young girls did not react when the symptoms of a VD started to manifest. Bracebridge Hemyng pointed at the fact that they were “innocent and inexperienced” and “allow[ed] their systems to be so shocked, and their constitutions so impaired, before the aid of the surgeon [was] sought for, that when he [did] arrive his assistance [was] almost useless.”¹⁴⁵ VDs were actually

¹⁴⁰ Prostitutes were particularly exposed to syphilis or gonorrhea.

¹⁴¹ A term used by Bracebridge Hemyng in Henry Mayhew’s book, op. cit., p.243.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Historian Françoise Barret-Ducrocq studied in detail the problem of seduced and abandoned women in her book, *L’amour sous Victoria*, Plon, 1989.

¹⁴⁴ Bracebridge Hemyng, p. 243.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

destructive for both old and young Victorian prostitutes. The LSPYF described what seemed to be an example of the difficulties experienced by young prostitutes:

[...] she becomes reckless and careless of her future course. It rarely occurs that one so young escapes contamination; and it is a fact, that numbers of these youthful victims imbibe disease, within a week or two of their seduction. They are then sent to one of the hospitals under a fictitious name by their keepers, that, within the short space of a few weeks, the bloom of health, of beauty, and of innocence, gives place to the sallow hue of disease, of despair, and of death.¹⁴⁶

However, it is difficult to know the accuracy of the LSPYF's remarks. It was impossible for the Victorians to estimate the number of prostitutes who were infected by VD. As many observers stated, some prostitutes did not know they were infected and consequently did not go systematically to hospital as soon as they caught VD.

3.5 – “Amateurs”

Finally, occasional prostitutes represented a class of women that must be considered apart from the rest of prostitutes, for they were not working for brothel keepers or entrapped by procurers. However, these part-time prostitutes “decided” to enter prostitution for two reasons: either to secure their freedom and autonomy or to survive. They could stop when they had saved enough money or when necessity was lessened. This is why they seemed to represent the biggest percentage of prostitutes during the Victorian period.¹⁴⁷ Notwithstanding that assumption, this temporary occupation did not “free women from a life of poverty and insecurity”.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, they could be confronted to rape, abuse or violence with some male clients – especially if they chose to work in the streets and did not use a house of accommodation where its occupants could have defended them in such situations. Moreover, they ran the same risk of being infected by VD and were as likely to get into the habit of drinking as any other prostitute. Furthermore, they could be subjected to harassment on the part of the police when kept prostitutes found a shelter in houses. Indeed, such places were not outlawed and a policeman would not easily enter a brothel.

Therefore, every type of prostitution was exposed with what could be considered its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, a kept prostitute could find in a brothel a sort of shelter, some security, a minimal standard of livings and a form of protection against violent men or police harassment that the streets did not offer. However, she was ill-treated on

¹⁴⁶ The LSPYF quoted by Michael Ryan, op. cit., p. 120.

¹⁴⁷ J. Walkowitz, op. cit., pp. 13-31.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 31.

many occasions by her keepers, did not possess a thing – not even her body – and any escape from this situation was nearly impossible. On the other hand, an “amateur” earned her own money. She also had her freedom as she could choose her hours, her way of working and could quit anytime she wanted. But she was confronted to the dangers of unwelcoming streets and her situation remained precarious. Finally, virgins experienced what seemed to be the cruelest and most violent form of prostitution according to twenty-first-century European standards. They were sexually tortured and the clients and procurers did not show any respect for them. Moreover, most of them were compelled to continue as kept prostitutes.

Although the degree to which prostitutes seemed to be able to choose the path they followed diverged, the truth is that this decision was imposed on them by external, social and economic factors. For this reason, it seemed increasingly important for many Victorians to undertake public and private actions, campaigns and movements in order to reduce this “scourge”.

PART IV:

THE FIGHT AGAINST PROSTITUTION

(Demeanours, actions and results)

Even though there was a progressive shift in the acceptance, exposition and treatment of Victorian prostitution, Londoners appeared as much divided when they took this problem into consideration. Prostitution was first ignored by the authorities before being eventually tackled. First, the British government imposed laws and bills to slow and restrain the trade of prostitution. But they were soon confronted to ensuing concern and protests from an important part of the London population. In parallel, institutions, observers and feminists undertook to denounce prostitution or help prostitutes.

The following and final part will focus on the various reactions from the London society which, although more visible in London, took off to other cities and gradually extended to the whole country. It will have a special interest in the different methods and actions that several Victorians used in order to deal with this “Great Social Evil”.

CHAPTER 1 – Between Pessimism and Condemnation

1.1 – A sensitive subject

In 1885, William Stead was condemned for trying to denounce how easy it was to buy a young girl for sexual intercourse. He was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for abduction while most of the procurers or brothel-keepers could carry on their trade without being brought to justice. Stead had been incriminated, for his methods of investigation were considered unlawful. As a consequence, the British government seemed to be putting all of its energy on the wrong problem, for attention was focused on one man while the problem of girls' rape seemed to be kept in silence both by Police Corps and neighbours. The following quotation is an extract from an interview between William Stead and an apparently well-known officer:

"[...] do you mean to tell me that in very truth actual rapes, in the legal sense of the word, are constantly being perpetrated in London on unwilling virgins, purveyed and procured to rich men at so much a head by keepers of brothels?" "Certainly," said he, "there is not a doubt of it." "Why," "I exclaimed, "the very thought is enough to raise hell." "It is true," he said; "and although it ought to raise hell, it does not even raise the neighbours."¹⁴⁹

This raised the assumption that authorities and neighbours were aware of child prostitution but did not move an inch to help the girls. The authorities' silence had already come to light when Mr. Smith, solicitor in Birmingham, stated in an interview with J. B. Talbot:

[...] if the examination be pursued, parties now living in happiness with their families may be brought before this court for examination, and disclosures made which must inevitably ruin their domestic peace. Some men in this town, respectable in their stations, must have their names brought before the world as visitors of a brothel, and associates of one whose immorality cannot be doubted.¹⁵⁰

That statement was made on the town of Birmingham but the same could be said about London. Men from high social ranks were known to be involved in prostitution but the government, the Court and policemen practiced a method of *laissez-faire*, fearing infamous cases could be unveiled to the public eye. They smoothed the situation and allayed the common Victorian citizen's suspicions through silence and mystification. In 1854, the editor of *The Times* explained that they would not "give more publicity than necessary to details already too well calculated to excite a prurient imagination and to stimulate the laggard

¹⁴⁹ W. Stead, *Maiden Tribute I*, "The Violation of virgins", op. cit.

¹⁵⁰ Mr. Smith quoted by J.B. Talbot in one of his pamphlets "The Miseries of Prostitution" (quotation exposed by William Logan in *The Great Social Evil* [...], op. cit., p. 82).

passions of exhausted debauchees”.¹⁵¹ It would be accurate to add that the “holiness” of the family sphere had to be protected and could not be broken by a public scandal that would reveal a husband’s infidelity. Incriminating publicly “respectable” and well-known men would be a hard blow to what the Victorian ideology conveyed and worshipped the most, namely: family respectability and organisation. Thus, Victorian authorities first opted for a policy of silence. This is how some Victorians appeared hypocritical and seemed to contradict themselves as they worshipped virtue, purity and respectability in the private sphere, but hid some dodgy cases and the problem of prostitution at large in the public sphere. That paradoxical position left a majority of the Victorian upper and middle-classes with a feeling of confusion and fear, for they were confronted to an unknown problem as soon as they came across the subject of prostitution. It must be noticed that this feeling of insecurity reached its peak years later, when William Stead revealed the extent of child prostitution in 1885, a few years before Jack the Ripper committed his crimes.¹⁵²

1.2 - A “necessary evil”

The reason of that attitude of *laissez-faire* could be explained by the fact that some Victorians considered prostitution as a matter of “necessity”. The justifications for such a vision may be numerous but most remain assumptions.

As already mentioned in part II, prostitution appeared as a flourishing economic system in Victorian England and many people could benefit from it in London – such as men for instance. To many Victorians it was clear that prostitution remained a “necessity”, for it allowed men from all ranks to relieve their sexual drives instead of remaining in a state of frustration. In this sense, prostitution seemed to allow some frustrated men to transfer their strong natural sexual desires¹⁵³ beyond restrained sexual intercourse with their wives. It must be remembered that according to Victorian standards, a “respectable” woman had supposedly no sexual drives and was allowed, on a few occasions, to have sexual intercourse with her husband for the unique purposes of reproducing the lineage and pleasing her husband.

Moreover, some Victorian observers perceived the government’s lack of determination to deal with prostitution as proof of their agreement on its “necessity”. In 1850, the

¹⁵¹ The editor of *The Times* quoted by W. Logan in *The Great Social Evil* [...], op. cit., pp. 82-83.

¹⁵² In 1888, Jack the Ripper killed five prostitutes in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel before slaughtering their bodies. It threw the population of London into a general panic and literary terrorised them. He had been considered as the first serial killer in the UK. His identity has remained a mystery and continues to fill up the most extravagant theories.

¹⁵³ William Acton’s statements, mentioned in part II on p. 28.

Westminster Review published an article relating to the attitude of the state towards London prostitution:

[...] the legislative and executive authorities, seeing it, deploring it, yet confess by their inaction their inability to check it, and their unwillingness to prohibit it, and virtually say to the unfortunate prostitutes and their frequenters – ‘As long as you create no public scandal, but throw a decent veil over your proceedings, we shall not interfere with you, but shall regard you as an inevitable evil.’ [...] The whole subject having been so unpopular, and the mere allusion to it virtually tabooed, even in administrative circles, perhaps from men’s nervous reluctance to admit acquaintance with it, only half-formed opinions prevail among the most enlightened official men, and extremely erroneous ones among the general public.¹⁵⁴

The previous newspaper underlined the passivity of the authorities, who either did not know how to deal efficiently with the important trade of prostitution or feared to be publicly linked to it. In any case, the government decided to hide it and make its subject taboo. Bracebridge Hemyng was also convinced that “legislature, by refusing to interfere, ha[d] tacitly declared the existence of prostitutes to be a necessary evil”.¹⁵⁵

Secondly, observers saw prostitution as necessary because it compensated for the British unfair wealth distribution. As we saw in the first part of this dissertation (p. 20), working-class women worked extra hours as harlots either to add up some money to their rather low wages or simply to receive a minimum wage if they happened to be unemployed. In 1839, observer Michael Ryan answered the question “are prostitutes necessary?” in this way:

Prostitution exists, and will always exist in large cities, and elsewhere, because, like mendicity and play, it is a most profitable calling, and a resource against starvation; and it might be said, against dishonour; for what excess will an individual, deprived of all resource, not commit, whose existence is compromised – though this is the most base, it still exist. If notwithstanding laws, punishments, public contempt, even gross brutality, and frightful disease, the inevitable consequences of prostitution, prostitutes still exist, is not this an evident proof that they cannot be put down, and that they are unavoidable in society. Remove them from mankind if you can, and all will become profligately licentious [...]¹⁵⁶

According to Ryan, prostitution was both necessary and unavoidable in cities, whatever its consequences. Indeed, it was a necessity both for poor women to earn enough money to meet their needs and to contain “licentiousness”.

¹⁵⁴ *Westminster Review*, “Prostitution”, July 1850, quoted by W. Acton, op. cit., ed. 1857, pp. 13, 14.

¹⁵⁵ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., p. 212.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Ryan, op. cit., p. 84.

Finally, we can add that prostitution strengthened a whole ideology. Indeed, the Victorian values about women – such as their indispensable virtue, morality and respectability – were glorified and strengthened when compared to the myth of the “dissolute” and “immoral” prostitute.

Thus, prostitutes, though despised, were often considered as necessary by many Victorian men. In point of fact, they played a key role and were given the responsibility to compensate some of the defective aspects of Victorian society.

1.3 - Prime Minister William Gladstone and prostitution

When Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone¹⁵⁷ spoke officially about “The Great Social Evil” in an article in *The Times*, he was aiming at middle and upper class readers. In 1858, he talked about the difficulty to deal with London prostitution and designated it as an inevitable trade:

There is a very disagreeable subject which we are compelled to bring [...] before the notice of the public, because it has become necessary to bring public opinion to bear upon it. [...] Let us not nourish any visionary expectations; it would be simply idle to suppose that the evil against which we are now directing our efforts can be put down by the strong hand of power. [...] Now, we are well aware that if the unfortunate creatures who parade these localities were swept away tomorrow, - if the night houses and the oyster-shops were closed by the police, we should not have really suppressed immorality. We should, however, have removed the evil from the sight of those who probably, had they not been tempted by the sight of these opportunities, would not have fallen into vicious ways at all. It is one thing to be compelled to seek for the opportunities of vicious indulgence - it is another when those opportunities seek you.¹⁵⁸

In fact, males’ vulnerability when confronted to “common” prostitution is highlighted through this extract. Gladstone seemed to adopt an attitude of *laissez-faire*, just noticing that any legislative action would not suppress the problem of “immorality” but move it away “from the sight of those” who would have been tempted. He sounded abashed and defeated by that “evil”. Notwithstanding this declaration, Gladstone’s attitude towards prostitution was much more complex. Some Victorians, who were interested in the question, perceived it as ambiguous. Indeed, Gladstone started private actions to rescue and rehabilitate prostitutes

¹⁵⁷ William Ewart Gladstone became four times Prime Minister as leader of the Liberal Party in 1868, 1880, 1886, 1892.

¹⁵⁸ Gladstone’s point of view on “the Great Social Evil”, *The Times*, 8 January, 1858 (appendix 3).

from the London streets in January 1840.¹⁵⁹ According to lecturer and modern historian Trevor Fisher, “he was the only prime minister to stalk the streets of London seeking to reclaim street prostitutes from a life of vice”.¹⁶⁰ These nocturne rescues were considered as disturbing and confusing while prostitution remained a sensitive subject for many Victorians. Did Gladstone try to prove his “morality” when he deliberately “courted evil”¹⁶¹, did he genuinely help prostitutes or had sexual intercourse with them, no one could ever say. Nonetheless, he cofounded the Church Penitentiary Association for the Reclamation of Fallen Women in 1848 and kept devoting part of his spare time in rescuing young prostitutes.

Thus, William Gladstone did not lead any official, fervent policies to protect girls and young women from prostitution but did private actions to rescue and help as many as possible. This is how he remained a Victorian man who was officiously and personally involved in the rescue of prostitutes but a Victorian Prime Minister who maintained a certain distance with the issue on the political ground. In fact, this ambiguous position could show the difficulty to deal with such matters in Victorian England and reflect the uncertainty of the British authorities faced to prostitution.

1.4 - Towards the regulation of prostitution

London legislators were faced with a problem that they seemed incapable to restrain. Throughout the 19th century, they had maintained what seemed to be a policy of non-intervention, while the problem of prostitution was dramatically increasing. Victorian observer James Greenwood criticised what he considered to be a policy of *laissez-faire* and designated it as partly responsible for the extent of prostitution:

The monstrous evil in question has grown to its present dimensions chiefly because we have silently borne our noses; and rather than pluck it up by the roots, rather than acknowledge its existence even, have turned away our heads and inclined our eyes skyward and thanked God for the many mercies conferred on us. [...] [The government] virtually say to the unfortunate prostitutes and their frequenters: ‘As long as you create no public scandal, but throw a decent veil over your proceedings, we shall not interfere with you, but shall regard you as inevitable evil. By an attempt to regulate and control them, the authorities would confess nothing more than they already in act acknowledge, viz. their desire to mitigate an evil which they have discovered their incompetency to suppress.’¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Marjie Bloy, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow, National University of Singapore, “William Ewart Gladstone (1809 — 1898): his work with ‘fallen women’”, on <<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/gladwom.html>> [Consulted: 08/05/2013]

¹⁶⁰ Historian Trevor Fisher quoted for the article “Sex and Mr Gladstone”, in *History Today*, Volume 48, 1998, on <<http://www.historytoday.com/trevor-fisher/sex-and-mr-gladstone>> [Consulted: 08/05/2013].

¹⁶¹ Historian H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 90-95, quoted on <<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/pms/gladwom.html>> [Consulted: 08/05/2013].

¹⁶² James Greenwood, op. cit., pp. 199, 201.

In this extract, Greenwood underlined the state's apparent difficulty and weakness faced with prostitution.

Eventually, authorities decided to tackle the issue head-on from the 1830s. Thus, they imposed laws to reduce the number of brothels or move prostitutes away from the luxurious centre of London. But they did not try and look at the source of prostitution that had, among other things, social and economic causes, namely: a bad repartition of British wealth leading a part of the British population to poverty. Their first solution was to hide prostitution by moving it away into delimited and low quarters, for, as Judith Walkowitz expressed "prostitutes were labelled public enemies, criminals, and outcasts".¹⁶³ Likewise, the British government were strongly convinced that the solution to eradicate this "Great Social Evil" was to police and lead repressive actions against what they thought to be its "direct agents", namely prostitutes, instead of finding solutions to minimise the issue at its source. Thus, they attacked prostitutes, first thanks to Acts for the suppression of brothels and then through a wave of medical harassment by means of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

In 1839, the Metropolitan Police Act was launched and became the first decisive step towards the repression of prostitution in London. It stated that "every common prostitute or nightwalker loitering or being in any thoroughfare or public place for the purpose of prostitution or solicitation to the annoyance of the inhabitants or passengers"¹⁶⁴ would be fined within "the limits of the Metropolitan Police District".¹⁶⁵ Likewise, "every person [...] knowingly [permitting] or [suffering] prostitutes or persons of notoriously bad character to meet together and remain therein, [would] for every such offence be liable to a penalty".¹⁶⁶ As a matter of fact, this act was passed to try and regulate "immoral" and visible sexuality by means of an increase of the Metropolitan Police's power and deployment in London. It also permitted the removal of prostitutes and brothels from "respectable" quarters to lower, less visible areas in the East End. Therefore, the first actions led by the British authorities officially designated prostitutes as nuisances, for they provoked disorder in "respectable and quiet" thoroughfares. But that repression against prostitutes was nothing compared to the Contagious Diseases Acts.

¹⁶³ Judith R. Walkowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁴ The Metropolitan Act 1839, "Section LIV/ 54, LIV Prohibition of Nuisances by Persons in the Thoroughfares", on <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/2-3/47/section/LIV/enacted>> [Consulted: 15/05/2013].

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 44, "Regulations of 9G. 4. c. 61 respecting public houses to extend to other houses of public resort", on <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/2-3/47>> [Consulted: 15/05/2013].

Indeed, modern readers can come across a series of Acts, which were the most criticised pieces of legislation intended against prostitutes during the Victorian period. The following paragraph will deal with the Contagious Diseases Acts. We will move away from London for a short moment, as these laws did not apply directly to the metropolis but shaped Victorian general attitudes towards prostitution. They were enforced in port cities in the South of England but also in Ireland; their repealers however – such as Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler or John Stuart Mill¹⁶⁷ – mainly inveighed against these Acts from the capital, where they could have more weight.

As already mentioned, the Contagious Diseases Acts were the 19th century Acts that stirred Victorian consciousness most and provoked a wave of revolt and protests. These three Acts were passed consecutively in 1864, 1866 and 1869. They were launched under the pretence to regulate VD among enlisted men. Despite this fact, it soon became clear that the first targets were public women. As far as medical observer William Acton was concerned, the 1866 Act had “the happiest results, both as regards the health of [the] army and navy, and the sanitary and moral improvement wrought in the unhappy women who [had] come within the scope of its provisions”.¹⁶⁸ However, not every Victorian was as convinced as Acton about the positive effects of such Acts. To many Victorians, these acts represented a violation of women’s civil rights and a systematic medical repression against prostitutes. Indeed, harlots had to undergo medical control anytime a representative of the British authority asked for it. This is why historian J. Walkowitz underlines the paradoxical aspect of these Acts. There was a significant difference between what had been stipulated and what was actually put into practice: “The accused could elect to submit voluntarily to the examination or be brought up by a magistrate (with all the publicity attendant to the event) and then be bound by his orders”.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the British state presented medical examination as optional while it was applied as mandatory in most of the cases. In addition, these Acts seemed to encourage some men to have sexual intercourse with virgins or very young prostitutes. Indeed, the existence of sexually transmitted diseases being more and more obvious and their consequences more visible, some men started to panic and turned to young prostitutes or virgins, who were thought to be less subjected to VD than older prostitutes.¹⁷⁰ Thus, the repeal of the three Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886 was a turning point for feminists, for it represented their

¹⁶⁷ Nightingale and Butler were both prominent female militants during the Victorian period. As for philosopher and political theorist J. S. Mill, he supported feminist actions and campaigns.

¹⁶⁸ William Acton, op. cit., ed. 1870, first page of his “Preface”.

¹⁶⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁷⁰ Catherine-Emilie Corvisy & Véronique Molinari, *Les femmes dans l'Angleterre victorienne et édouardienne. Entre sphère privée et sphère publique*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2008, p. 248.

first strong victory in England and showed their genuine concern and interest in the fate of prostitutes.¹⁷¹

At that time, another issue created a general criticism: the age of consent, which was considered as extremely low. The government decided to pass the 1875 Act that raised the age of consent from 12 to 13. However, this measure appeared as rather insignificant to many Victorians, for a girl of 13 cannot be said to be much more mature or adult than a girl of 12. This is why the 1885 Criminal Amendment Act came into force in order to raise the age of consent to 16. It had been passed in reaction to William Stead's publications, which dealt with child prostitution and rapes in the city of London.¹⁷² Rarely an article had created such an outcry in Victorian London, for people were outraged and profoundly shocked. Public meetings were organised, such as in Hyde Park, where around 250,000 people demonstrated in favour of the raising of the age of consent on 22 August.¹⁷³

In 1885, the passage of the Criminal Amendment Act marked a real step forwards in British policies and underlined a wave of change in Victorian minds towards prostitution. Authorities put official, written words on activities that had been rather overlooked by the legislation. For example, they defined the act of procuring and what a procurer was¹⁷⁴ and eventually introduced the word "rape" in the British constitutional vocabulary dealing with prostitution, under the headline "Power, on indictment for rape, to convict of certain misdemeanours".¹⁷⁵ Therefore, what had been known but exposed only by a handful of men and women became official and outlawed. Moreover, the terms of the law were numerous but its most important points were directed towards the protection of girls and women. For instance, procurers were found guilty and could be penalised up to two years of imprisonment if they procured girls under 21 for the purpose of making them common prostitutes or employed them in a brothel¹⁷⁶ but also if they drugged or threatened them.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ This point will be discussed further on, p. 62.

¹⁷² William Stead had been supported financially both by Josephine Butler and Catherine Booth (fervent activist in "the Salvation Army" – a Victorian Institution that helped women).

¹⁷³ Judith R. Walkowitz, op. cit., p. 246.

¹⁷⁴ *Justice of the Peace Magazine*, "The Criminal Amendment Act, 1885: With its introduction, Notes and Index", London: Shaw and Sons, 1885, p. 23, on <<http://archive.org/stream/criminallawamen00bodkgoog#page/n2/mode/2up>> [Consulted: 11/05/2013].

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 61-69.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 30-38.

The British legislators therefore made efforts to restrict prostitution or at least to quiet growing criticisms and protests. Yet they also showed a form of uncertainty, indecisiveness and mainly appeared as confused in the way they should positively control prostitution.

CHAPTER 2 – Men’s Participation to Help Prostitutes and Denounce Prostitution

Moralists, philanthropists or even medical men started feeling uneasiness, preoccupation or disgust at the way prostitution existed in their society. They led important investigations or actions in order to denounce and try to correct the wrongs of prostitution from the 1830s. In 1885, William Stead was the first investigator who referred to juvenile prostitution not as “sexual immorality” but as “sexual criminality”.¹⁷⁸ In the 1880s, this new consideration of the prostitute challenged the “common” vision that many Victorian people used to have of prostitutes. However, a gradual and transitional shift occurred in the way men considered prostitutes and we shall have a special interest in this subject throughout the following chapter.

2.1 – Midnight meetings, metropolitan homes and refuges

First and foremost, midnight meetings, metropolitan homes and refuges organised in London throughout the 19th century. B. Hemyng gave a significant list of the main refuges and homes for the protection of girls in London¹⁷⁹: they were amongst others the London Female Dormitory, St Marylebone Female Protection Society, Westminster Female Refuge, St James’ Home, the Lock Asylum or Magdalene Hospital.¹⁸⁰ These institutions and movements were aimed at helping prostitutes through direct actions and were likely to succeed in rescuing women in most cases. For instance, the LSPYF helped many young prostitutes to find another situation or return to their family and friends.¹⁸¹ Its Committee also gave “advice to parents and friends, who ha[d] applied to them, and whose daughters, by this means, ha[d] been prevented from entering on a life of prostitution”.¹⁸² In addition, these

¹⁷⁸ William Stead, *Maiden Tribute I*, “Liberty for Vice, Repression for Crime”, op. cit.

¹⁷⁹ Bracebridge Hemyng, op. cit., pp. 268-269.

¹⁸⁰ Magdalene Hospitals or commonly called “Magdalene Asylums” aimed at helping “fallen women” to reintegrate society by providing them skills for an eventual job. Yet these institutions gradually imposed strict rules and hard work on their inmates with the idea of rescuing them from what they thought to be a life of “sins”.

¹⁸¹ The LSPYF quoted by Michael Ryan, op. cit., pp. 125-129.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 142.

Societies, homes and refuges sent men with tracts in the streets of the East End, whose mission was to advise and help prostitutes to return to the “respectable” side of society.

Notwithstanding this small help, many Victorians criticised these Institutions, not for the actions they undertook, but for the way they were managed. According to the *London City Mission Magazine*, “the multiplication of societies for the same, or nearly the same object, [was] an evil, and [could] only be *justified* by the existing Institutions being insufficient and incapable of enlargement, or by being inefficiently managed.”¹⁸³ This newspaper considered that there were too many institutions, which scattered funds instead of gathering them in a few substantial Institutions.¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless, these Institutions seemed to remain one of the few sources of help that were proposed to the girls and women who wanted to step out of prostitution.

To add to these Institutions, evening and religious meetings were also organised next to the “dens” of prostitution. They seemed to have gained in importance around the 1860s. Rev. Baptist Noel¹⁸⁵ was popular for his Midnight Meeting Movement. He reclaimed prostitutes and talked to them in order to rescue as many as possible. Indeed, Rev. Noel made speeches on Christian grounds and proposed prostitutes to go back home, find another situation or at least receive medical care. In his second edition, William Acton quoted an article published in *The Star*, which described – in a rather moralistic way that may recall how most Victorians perceived prostitutes – one of the midnight meetings organised by Noel.¹⁸⁶ Acton actually relied on this detailed description to express his disagreement with these evangelical meetings. Indeed, he sounded rather sceptical about the impact of such actions:

Sorry should I be to appear even to slight the efforts of any fellow-labourer, but truth compels me to say that of all the useless expedients adopted for remedying by private measures public wrong, this seems about the worst. Such public exhibitions and appeals to excited feelings are scarcely calculated to produce durable impressions. That which midnight meetings seldom achieve, the proposed medical inspections and hospital detentions ensure, namely access, and in addition they afford the prostitute temporary repose from excitement and time for reflection. These are the very advantages that are attempted to be supplied by Lock asylums and penitentiaries. Notwithstanding the most constant and self-denying exertions of the managers of these institutions, comparatively few fallen women come under their cognizance, and of these very few are permanently reformed.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ *London City Mission Magazine*, Number 37, “Fallen Females in the Metropolis”, November 1840, p. 162.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ The Honourable Reverend Baptist Wriothlesley Noel was an English evangelical clergyman during the 19th century.

¹⁸⁶ *The Star*, “Midnight movement”, 23 February 1868, quoted by William Acton, *op. cit.*, ed. 1870, pp.260-263 (appendix 4).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

In fact, Acton underlined the temporal aspect of the help that was proposed. Indeed, prostitutes could be sheltered and taken care of for a few weeks but had to return to prostitution if no other situation was found. Therefore, these actions were small and rarely provided permanent solutions.

2.2 - Investigators faced with the “evil”

However difficult the subject might be, men started trying to investigate and observe as objectively as possible the trade of prostitution from the 1830s – which, needless to say, was an almost impossible task. In this subpart, we shall go back to Victorian observers, for they represented a turning point in the treatment of prostitution.

A. J. N. Parent-Duchâtelet was the first person to observe and study prostitution in detail and devoted more than five years of his life to this difficult and fastidious task. His famous book, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, was first published in 1836.¹⁸⁸ This work proposed a method to investigate prostitution. Indeed, Duchâtelet presented the prostitution of Paris in all of its aspects, relying on data and testimonies from people that he interviewed himself. Thereafter, this elaborate method was used by some Victorians in order to observe English and London prostitution.

Indeed, Victorian observers started to name and describe an unknown problem during the 1830s. They systematically noted, classified, organised the types of prostitutes but also the extent, consequences and causes of prostitution. They looked at it through a magnifying glass, in a style that was reminiscent of the scientific method of Charles Darwin, who observed from a rather objective position every aspect of a phenomenon in the 1830s. In point of fact, most of these Victorian writers tried to take some distance with the subject matter so as to appear as mere observers. This is why, observer James Greenwood indicated that he had placed “the plain facts and figures before the reader, that he may deal with them according to his conscience”¹⁸⁹ and William Acton wrote with a sort of “sobriety of tone” and “cool reason”.¹⁹⁰

The reasons why they started to work on the problem of prostitution seem numerous. Generally, these men invested themselves with the mission of exposing prostitution in order to make the British population aware or warn young women of its dangers. To many

¹⁸⁸ Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, *La Prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, Paris : J.B Baillière et Fils, 1836.

¹⁸⁹ James Greenwood, op. cit., p. 202.

¹⁹⁰ William Acton, op.cit., ed. 1857, p. 4.

observers, it was clear that if the population knew the problem, they would be able to deal with it in a better way. As far as William Acton was concerned, the problem had been hidden for too long. This explained why he started observing prostitution:

To have called things here treated of by other than their right names would have been in any writer an absurdity – in me a gross one. [...] The problem has been ignored under “the shelter of false delicacy. [...] those who profess a real or fictitious ignorance of prostitution, its miseries, and its ill effects – and those again who plead conscience as an excuse for inaction, I have this one reply. Pointing to the outward signs of prostitution in our streets and hospitals, I inquire whether we can flatter ourselves that the subject has drifted into a satisfactory state on the “know-nothing” and “do-nothing” principles. [...] It is by no means certain, moreover, that exhortations to prudence and self-respect may not better prepare the heart of a vicious woman to receive the foundation of morality than the burnt tracts of the missionary or the hated staff of the policeman.¹⁹¹

William Acton denounced and condemned both the “heart of a vicious woman” and the passivity of the British authorities. He thought that the problem of prostitution could be treated by a firm control over men’s sexual behaviours instead of women’s. As for Michael Ryan, he expressed his conviction on the difficulty to expose and deal publicly with prostitution:

It is a unanimous opinion, that it would be impossible to legislate upon prostitution publicly, as it would be a cause of great scandal to the youth of both sexes, and a permanent source of debauchery and immorality. It would also be difficult to frame any laws for the suppression of this species of immorality, which could prevent the affected, from enjoying the ordinary rights of society.¹⁹²

Therefore, investigators were mixed in the way to approach prostitution. We can feel that they wanted to denounce it objectively but were entrapped by their own ideologies. While, some pointed at a policy of inaction and “cowardice” from the authorities, others found it difficult to impose legislative and proper sanctions. Thus, each man dealing on the question tried to propose his own solutions and impose his views on his readership but did not have the power to implement measures, which would have helped to eradicate this “social evil”.

In addition, most of them – such as Michael Ryan or Bracebridge Hemyng – designated men as the true felons of that “evil” and prostitutes their mere “victims”. Paradoxically enough, they associated prostitutes with the terms: “immorality”, “vice”, “deprived” and “degraded”. In a sense, observers seemed to have indirectly mixed their observations with a moralistic point of view and were not conscious of judging prostitutes in

¹⁹¹ Ibid, “Preface”, pp. v-vii.

¹⁹² Michael Ryan, op. cit., p. 83.

their books. It is also clear that their goal was not to defend the already “fallen” women but rather to prevent others to follow the same path. According to J. Greenwood, some observers often unconsciously divided prostitutes into two categories. On the one hand, there was a category of truly deserving victims, who were to be pitied – such as virgins – and on the other hand, some “low” prostitutes with no “delicacy”, who were to be blamed¹⁹³ – for instance kept prostitutes. As an investigator, William Acton directly lunched prostitutes as “immoral beings” and guilty individuals when he stated in 1857:

Such women [prostitutes], ministers of evil passions, not only gratify desire, but also arouse it. Compelled by necessity to seek for customers, they throng out streets and public places, and suggest evil thoughts and desires which might otherwise remain undeveloped. [...] Prostitutes have the power of soliciting and tempting. [...] The prostitute is a sad burlesque of woman, presenting herself as an object of lust instead of an object of honourable love - a source of base gratification, instead of a reason for self-restraint; familiarizing man with this aspect of women till he can see no other, and his indulged body and debased mind lead him to seek in them only sensual gratification, and to make, if possible, of every woman the thing that he desires - a toy, a plaything, an animated doll; a thing to wear like a glove, and fling away; to use like a horse, and send to the knackers when worn out; the mere object of his fancy and servant of his appetite.¹⁹⁴

In this way, Acton condemned London prostitutes, for he described them as cunning and manipulative women. In this extract, the prostitutes’ “immorality” is contrasted with the vulnerability of the clients, who were tempted by these “ministers of evil passions”. Acton argued that some men treated women like sexual objects because of the image that the latter mirrored them. However, this point of view was contradicted fifteen years later by William Stead’s, who designated men as the true entrappers of girls in his whole series of articles.¹⁹⁵ This is how we can notice that the different observations made on prostitution shifted according to the observer. However, as far as Dr. William Tait was concerned, whatever “immoral” the prostitute might be, he still “found in her the heart of a woman”.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ James Greenwood, op. cit., p. 202.

¹⁹⁴ William Acton, op. cit., ed. 1870, p. 166.

¹⁹⁵ William Stead, op. cit.

¹⁹⁶ In 1847, Dr William Tait, former surgeon in Edinburgh, addressed himself at a meeting in New-Castle-on-Tyne, quotation taken back by William Logan in *The Great Social Evil* [...], op. cit., p. 26.

CHAPTER 3 – The Rise of Women’s Voice

In the early Victorian period, male writers dominated the writings, studies and observations that dealt with the various aspects of prostitution. However, a dramatic change occurred in the 1860s. Indeed, women started moving away from a general submissive status to a defiant position against males’ domination and that was particularly marked by middle-class women’s growing concern and protests towards the situation of prostitutes. Consequently, they led actions that shifted woman’s position ever after. They became active in order to gain more liberty and rights for women. Many historians have seen these changes in women’s attitudes as early feminism.¹⁹⁷ Women’s first movements started in reaction to the Contagious Diseases Acts. This was a turning-point as they victoriously obtained the repeal of the laws in 1886. Then, their strong position on the political stage was reinforced by their protests against men’s sexual rapes and abuses on children and young women in the 1880s. Consequently, we will study the different positions and actions that middle-class women adopted to protect and defend prostitutes from the 1860s.

3.1 - Early class consciousness

In 1856, an Englishwoman wrote a letter to *The Times* in which she gave her point of view about prostitution and sexual trafficking of girls.¹⁹⁸

[...] will any of your correspondents, point out what it is our duty to do? - how we are expected to act, to speak, or even to think on such subjects? We have been told heretofore by men whom we respect that it becomes a woman to be absolutely silent on such revolting topics [...] We have been told that, in virtuous women, it is a breach of feminine delicacy even to suppose the existence of certain outcasts of our own sex [...] in short, that, as women of virtue, we have nothing to do with such questions, though we know, too well, how deeply they affect us, how terribly near they approach us personally, how the far-reaching contagion of such covert vice involves in some form or other the peace of our "virtuous" homes, the fidelity of our husbands, the health and morality of our sons, the innocence of our daughters. [...] I have myself been told, half pityingly, half sneeringly - that for every one unhappy creature we rescue out of the streets two will be at once supplied to fill up the vacancy; that this "state of things" is a necessary social evil; and that we virtuous women had better not meddle with it, lest worse befall us. [...]

This letter is a description of Victorian mores and how a woman should behave when confronted – by chance – with such matters. Yet a certain discomfort and confusion seemed to be expressed through these remarks. This woman was perfectly aware of the fate of some working-class women but she seemed uncertain about the proper position to adopt towards

¹⁹⁷ Historians such as Sheila Jeffreys, in “Women and sexuality”, op. cit.

¹⁹⁸ Letter published in *The Times*, March 28, 1856.

these “unhappy creature[s]”. Women started feeling uncomfortable about what they were told and what was really happening to these “outcasts of [their] own sex”.

3.2 - First actions

As we have seen, the three Contagious Diseases Acts were passed to tackle venereal diseases in the 1860s. However, they were strongly rejected by female reformers. Indeed, some middle-class people considered them as the reinforcement of men’s domination over submissive women with the state’s official approbation.¹⁹⁹

In 1869, the Ladies’ National Association (LNA) was established in response to these Acts. It was led by Josephine Butler and Elizabeth Wolstenholme - two prominent female militants. Only women were accepted in this association, which represented an influential organisation for the protection and defence of prostitutes on the political stage. In 1870, the LNA wrote a manifesto that was published by the *Daily News* under the title “Women’s Protest”. Through the article, members of the Association positioned themselves and explained their discontent about the Acts:

2nd – Because as far as women are concerned, they remove every guarantee of personal security which the law has established and held sacred, and put their reputation, their freedom, and their persons absolutely in the power of the police.

4th – Because it is unjust to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause, both of the vice and its dreaded consequences; and we consider that liability to arrest, forced medical treatment, and (where this is resisted) imprisonment with hard labour, to which these acts subject women, are the punishment of the most degrading kind.

6th – Because these measures are cruel to the women who come under their action [...]

7th [...] The advocates of the system have utterly failed to show, by statistics or otherwise, that these regulations have in any case, after several years’ trial, and when applied to one sex only, diminished disease, reclaimed the fallen, or improved the general morality of the country. [...]²⁰⁰

This manifesto stressed the fact that the Acts would endanger prostitutes’ rights, freedom and reputation. These laws were established by men and protected them, when women had to submit to “the power of the police”. Therefore, the LNA reversed male Victorian observers’ suppositions and beliefs on what sexuality should be both for men and women.

What is now known as the social purity movement also developed in reaction to these Acts in the 1870s. Its proponents judged the Contagious Diseases Acts as unfair and

¹⁹⁹ Sheila Jeffreys, op. cit., p. 195.

²⁰⁰ Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade*, “Origin of the System of State Regulation of Vice“, London: Horace Marshal and Son, 1910, pp. 9-10.

repressive. Despite the puritan and moralist aspects of this movement, it mainly looked for the reduction of prostitution and men's sexual abuses perpetrated on girls.²⁰¹ Its members also deplored the violence exerted by men on Victorian women, especially on those who worked as prostitutes – a violence that was personified by Jack the Ripper, who murdered prostitutes in the streets of London in 1888. Moreover, both men and women took part in this movement through several associations, either mixed organisations such as the National Vigilance Association or associations composed exclusively with women such as the feminist Moral Reform Union. Therefore, they united their efforts to fight sexual abuses in prostitution and condemned male clients.²⁰²

Historically, this was the first time women officially organised to take the defence of prostitutes. They all agreed on the condemning and restrictive aspects of the Contagious Diseases Acts directed against prostitutes. This is why they asked for their repeal, which, as already mentioned, they victoriously obtained in 1886 – one year after the Criminal Amendment Act.

3.3 – *The debate around the age of consent*

As already mentioned throughout this dissertation, William Stead wrote a series of articles and used sensationalism in order to shock the public's consciousness. In fact, feminist Josephine Butler and Catherine Boot – member of the Victorian Institution, “The Salvation Army” – asked and funded Stead to do so. They felt that their cause to protect young girls and children were constantly rebuffed by the authorities and aimed at presenting child rapes and young girls' prostitution to the public eye. Consequently, William Stead's articles were published in 1885 and succeeded in their main goal, for people were shocked and outraged. As a matter of fact, Victorians obtained the raising of the age of consent to 16 thanks to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. To the feminists who had fought so long for the protection of girls, this Act was a victory. Nonetheless, Judith Walkowitz considered it with a suspicious eye. To her, it was a “historical irony”, for it gave more power and control to policemen over working-class women.²⁰³ Moreover, this Act closed down many brothels – around 1,200 brothel keepers were put to trial in England between 1885 and 1914²⁰⁴ – where

²⁰¹ Sheila Jeffreys, op. cit., p. 194.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 195.

²⁰³ Judith R. Walkowitz, op. cit., p. 247.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 252.

prostitutes found security and minimal living conditions. In this sense, it could have been considered as a new form of repression against poor prostitutes.

Therefore, the Criminal Law Amendment Act overlooked the prostitutes' needs but also the fact that some women entered prostitution due to a lack of money. For instance, it did not provide any solutions to the problems of "surplus women" or low-paid jobs. As a result, this Act, which had been waited for during so many years, attacked prostitution on the surface but not directly at its source.

3.4 - Victorian Double Standard of Morality

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a double standard is "a rule or principle which is unfairly applied in different ways to different people or groups".²⁰⁵ During the Victorian period, the "double standard of morality" designated the two different Victorian approaches concerning men and women's sexuality. Men's sexual enjoyment outside marriage was tolerated, for they visited prostitutes without being subjected to rejection by society as long as they did it secretly. However, women seemed to be compelled to follow strict sexual codes and could be considered as "immoral" any time they diverted from the ideology of the "angel in the house". Likewise, they were not allowed to have extramarital intercourse and had to relieve their husbands' sexual drives anytime they asked for it.

In 1886, Josephine Butler challenged "this double standard of morality" in an article in *The Philanthropist*:

[...] we are at once brought into contact with the false and misleading idea that the essence of right and wrong is in some way dependent on sex. [...] It is a fact, that numbers even of moral and religious people have permitted themselves to accept and condone in man what is fiercely condemned in woman. [...] The double standard of morality owes its continued existence very greatly to the want of a common sentiment concerning morality on the part of men and women, especially in the more refined classes of society. Men are driven away at an early age from the society of women and thrown upon the society of each other only - in schools, colleges, barracks, etc.; [...] Even those men who are personally pure and blameless become persuaded by the force of familiarity with male profligacy around them, that this sin in man is venial and excusable. They interpret the ignorance and silence of women as indulgent acquiescence and support. [...] the essence of right and wrong is in no way dependent upon sex, and shall demand of men precisely the same chastity as it demands of women.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ OED, "double standard", on <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/double-standard?q=double+standard> [Consulted: 25/05/2013].

²⁰⁶ Josephine Butler, "The Double Standard of Morality", *The Philanthropist*, October 1886 (appendix 5)

In this extract, Butler's remarks stressed the fact that she did not want to change Victorian ideology or mores that were linked to women's social or sexual behaviours. Instead, the change that was needed was the imposition of a new moral on men. According to her, too many men did not control themselves and saw a certain class of women as sexual relief. She thought that prostitution could be reduced by a change in the way men perceived women and with the application of a standard of morality on them too. Therefore, there should not be a double standard but one, unique standard of morality in England. In the article from *the Philanthropist*, Butler pointed at a policy of *laissez-faire* from the upper or middle-class men and women:

Women are guilty also in this matter, for they unfortunately have imitated the tone and sentiments of men, instead of chastening and condemning them; and have shown, too often, very little indeed of the horror which they profess to feel for sins of impurity. [...] The press and the pulpit, apparently dismayed by the enormity of the evil, the one sometimes in sympathy with it, the other losing faith in the power of God and in spiritual revival, have ceased altogether to administer any adequate rebuke. In our homes and in social circles mistaken delicacy has come to the aid of cowardice, and the truth is betrayed even in the house of its friends. The warnings of God are concealed, and young men and women are left to be taught by sad and irremediable experience the moral truths which should be impressed upon them early in life by faithful instructors.

Women were accused of being permissive as they did not rightly stand up to men's domination and sins. Therefore, these women appeared as guilty as the "press and the pulpit's" attitudes of *laissez-faire*. Butler was also strongly convinced that there was another double standard applied on women:

Worldly and impure men have thought, and still think, they can separate women, as I have said, into two classes - the protected and refined ladies who are not only to be good, but who are, if possible, to know nothing except what is good; and those poor outcast daughters of the people whom they purchase with money, and with whom they think they may consort in evil whenever it pleases them to do so, before returning to their own separated and protected homes. [...] It is that a large section of female society has to be told off - set aside, so to speak, to minister to the irregularities of the excusable man. That section is doomed to death, hurled to despair; while another section of womanhood is kept strictly and almost forcibly guarded in domestic purity.²⁰⁷

Many men and moralists tended to divide women into two classes: on the one hand, "the angel in the house" – the pure, untouchable and protected woman – and on the other hand, "the fallen woman" or the "necessary" prostitute.

Although J. Butler denounced "the double standard of morality" as the society's acceptance of men's oppression over a class of women, it is true that she did not want to change Victorian ideas about women, for she firmly believed that women were naturally

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

chaste, moral, virtuous and “instinctively homemakers”.²⁰⁸ In fact, these ideas overlapped with the middle class’ point of view on female qualities and attributes, which shows that Butler lacked a certain distance when she dealt with the subject.

3.5 - *Including working-class women*

Most of the early and mid-Victorian militants – such as Josephine Butler – applied a middle-class point of view on a working-class problem and tended to overlook the needs of working-class prostitutes. Butler spoke about the problem of prostitution and working-class women’s poverty. However, she did not try to propose direct solutions to working-class women’s problems. Moreover, it is difficult to find primary sources dealing with well-known prostitutes’ or working-class women’s involvement in Victorian political campaigns or movements – as in the repeal campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts. As Barbara Caine stresses, “prostitutes were spoken for rather than being invited to speak”.²⁰⁹ In a way, most female militants from the 19th century “[took] it for granted that only middle-class women typify British womanhood”.²¹⁰ In addition, Victorian feminists tended to think that a change in men’s behaviours but also women’s suffrage would help working-class women.

Emma Paterson was one of the exceptions to the rule. She seemed to link working-class women’s problems to their precarious economic position and undertook direct actions to help these women.²¹¹ Even though she did not help prostitutes with direct measures, Emma Paterson helped them indirectly by tackling the problem of low wages. She aimed at compensating defective laws and bringing working-class women into political activities by creating the Women’s Protective and Provident League in 1874.²¹² Through this organisation, she sought to develop unions in every trade where women were employed²¹³ – a measure that could have an impact on the reduction of occasional prostitutes.

During the mid and late 19th Century, prostitution had become a subject of preoccupation and almost fear. For several decades, it had remained an unspoken or even a necessary problem, an ‘evil’ that seemed to be known by everybody but that nobody was able

²⁰⁸ Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980*, New-York: Oxford Press University Inc., 1997, pp. 111- 112.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p.111.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 126.

²¹¹ Senior lecturer Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840*, “Women Organizing”, New-York: Routledge, 2005.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

to expose. British authorities felt that they could no longer overlook or hide the problem and had to take important measures. Their solution was to regulate the “Great Social Evil”. However, parallel actions were led by philanthropists and moralists: some meetings were organised and refuges or homes were created. Yet no permanent solution could be found, and even less implemented, without the help of the Government. Thus, these private initiatives barely enabled activists to provide temporary or definite relief to prostitutes. Moreover, observers started a thorough work to explain, expose and give solutions or remedies in order to tackle prostitution. Although, they tried to sound as much objective as possible, their works were marked by their personal points of view, most of the time reflecting strong Victorian ideologies and condemning the “morality” of prostitutes. However, an outcry began to be heard from middle-class women as well. Indeed, feminists rejected male observers’ versions as to them women did not have to “sacrifice” themselves due to men’s uncontrolled desires and were in fact victims.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Sheila Jeffreys, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

CONCLUSION

To portray prostitution has always been a difficult task to perform. This dissertation does not have the pretension to surpass, undermine or emphasise one of the ways by which contemporary observers and modern historians have tried to deal with Victorian prostitution. Instead, the interest of this work has been to study and focus on the attitudes adopted by Victorians to observe and deal with early and mid-Victorian prostitution among working-class women and link their thorough observations with some modern studies in order to present London prostitution as detailed as possible.

First, this dissertation started with the presentation of the different causes leading working-class women to prostitution according to well-known male and female Victorian observers. The aim has been to contrast masculine, moralistic works with middle-class women's points of view. Indeed, the position adopted by an observer depended on his/her gender and social environment. On this point, it is also interesting to use and rely on available modern information in order to complete and bring new elements to the causes of Victorian prostitution among working-class women. As we have seen, social and economic difficulties may be considered by a modern observer as a chief cause of Victorian prostitution in London.

As Victorian investigators tried to expose every aspect of Victorian prostitution to understand the problem, including its actors, we based our second part on two logical and concomitant aspects of prostitution, that is to say: its evolution as a trade linked to its different participants. No matter which position these people occupied in prostitution, either as key actors (procurers, keepers) or minor participants (such as touters or midwives), each of them had his importance in the trade and made it effective in London. They also seemed to share the same characteristics, for they were often depicted as manipulative and vicious beings. Yet the position given to male clients, either seen as victims or main agents, was controversial and divided investigators.

This is how we have naturally moved to the consequences that such a trade could have on prostitutes in the third part of our study. As we have seen, contemporary studies often tended to portray prostitutes' life as miserable. Whatever the status that a prostitute could claim in the hierarchy of prostitution, her life was often described with pessimism. Indeed, to many Victorians, ill-treatment, drunkenness and VD were inherent consequences in prostitution.

Rape could be sometimes added to this dark depiction. Thus, freedom and happiness seemed to be two concepts beyond the reach of most prostitutes.

Yet Victorian prostitution cannot be studied without mentioning the constant energy and efforts that some Victorians put into actions or works in order to abate and control this problem. Many joined a movement, institution or organisation when others supported laws to deal with this “Great Social Evil”. Yet they were not unified and, in their fight, tended to overlook the fact that prostitutes were, above all, human beings and not a mass of “fallen women”. Likely, it appeared that most Victorian observers, militants or authorities wanted to reassert their position or ideologies in society through the denunciation of prostitution.

Finally, we can say that contemporary works and studies are useful to understand and try to portray as fully as possible London prostitution in the mid and early 19th century. However, they also reflect the fact that Victorian militants, observers or the government accused and blamed the individual – on many occasions the prostitute – instead of focusing on the failures of the prevailing economic and social system.

Yet the importance of people’s concern for this “scourge” seemed to be an inherent part of the Victorian era, for prostitution challenged their ideologies, rules or social status. In point of fact, the observations made on prostitution became more and more scarce from the 1890s, the focus shifting to women’s emancipation and suffrage.

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Appendix 1

John Leech

“The Great Social Evil”

Punch 33, 10 January 1857



It must be noted that the word “gay” here was used to designate a “prostitute”.

<<http://www.victorian.org/periodicals/punch/49.html>> [Consulted: 09/03/2013]

Appendix 2

Metropolitan Police District's statistics

“A Return of the number of Brothels and Prostitutes in London”

20 May 1857

A Return of the number of Brothels and Prostitutes within the Metropolitan Police District, as nearly as could be ascertained at that date (May 20th, 1857).

Division	Number of Brothels				Number of Prostitutes				
	Where prostitutes are kept	Where prostitutes lodge	Where prostitutes resort	Total	Total returned in 1841	Well dressed, living in brothels	Well dressed, walking the streets	Low, infesting low neighbourhoods	Total
A	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
B	—	135	18	153	181	16	144	364	524
C	14	92	46	152	83	168	150	—	318
D	10	113	16	139	93	49	188	289	526
E	30	110	54	194	266	74	85	387	546
F	26	—	19	45	181	60	120	300	480
G	3	77	27	107	360	26	165	158	349
H	209	217	43	471	289	132	420	1251	1803
K	—	402	17	419	882	13	438	517	965
L	—	184	193	377	275	108	329	365	802
M	12	138	28	178	178	13	71	583	667
N	53	98	34	185	152	87	142	216	445
P	3	33	29	65	36	63	67	98	228
R	46	66	36	148	122	69	116	216	401
S	—	52	36	88	96	8	90	133	231
T	—	12	—	12	107	—	12	94	106
V	4	37	6	47	4	35	82	92	209
Total	410	1766	649	2825	3325	921	2616	5063	8600
Do. 1841	933	1544	848	3325	—	2071	1994	5344	9409

<<http://www.victorianlondon.org/crime/numbersofprostitutes.htm>> [Consulted: 18/01/2013]

Appendix 3

William Ewart Gladstone

“The Great Social Evil”

The Times, 8 January 1858

There is a disagreeable subject which we are compelled to bring, although most reluctantly, before the notice of the public, because it has become necessary to bring public opinion to bear upon it.

Many clergymen and gentlemen are now associating themselves together to take reasonable measures of discouragement and repression. Let us not nourish any visionary expectations; it would be simply idle to suppose that the devil against which we are now directing our efforts can be put down by the strong hand of power. [...]

Time was – and the time is not a very remote one – when a British gentleman – we speak of all three home divisions of the empire – would nightly stagger or be carried up to his bed fuddled, if not absolutely drunk. A man who should thus expose himself in our own days would be set down as a beast, and his society would be avoided by all whose store on their own good name. In this respect there has been a palpable improvement in the manners of the age. Surely public opinion can be brought to bear against one vice as well as another? The time may come when a man shrink from presenting himself in the sacred circle of his mother, his sisters, and his other female relatives, reeking from secret immorality.

Now, we say it with much shame, that in no capital city in Europe is there daily any mightily such a shameless display of prostitution as in London. At Paris, at Vienna, at Berlin, as every one knows, there is plenty of vice; but, at least, it is not allowed to parade the streets- to tempt the weak, to offend and disgust all rightly-thinking persons.

If any one would see the evil of which we speak in its full development, let him pass along the Haymarket and its neighbourhood at night, when the night houses and the oyster-shops open. It is not an easy matter to make your way along without molestation. In Regent Street, in the Strand, in Fleet Street, the same nuisance, but in a less degree, prevails.

Now, we are well aware that if the unfortunate creatures who parade these localities were swept away tomorrow, - if the night houses and the oyster-shops were closed by the police, we should not have really suppressed immorality. We should, however, have removed the evil from the sight of those who probably, had they not been tempted by the sight of these opportunities, would not have fallen into vicious ways at all.

It is one thing to be compelled to seek for the opportunities of vicious indulgence - it is another when those opportunities seek you. Vice, feasting, supping, dancing, and hectoring about in recognized manner amid flaring gaslights is one thing: vice cowering and shrinking into dirty corners, with the badge upon it of secrecy and shame, is quite another.

Appendix 4

“The Midnight Mission”

The Star, 23 February 1868

[...] The promoters of that new movement which takes the shape of a midnight mission to fallen women do not seek publicity for themselves; but, as they must hope for support from public sympathy and approval, neither do they shroud their doings from the observation of such as may fairly claim to be eyewitnesses. [...] The invitations distributed in the public resorts of that unhappy class for which we have no name, one does not shrink from writing, fixed twelve o'clock as the hour of meeting. Half an hour past that time, passing up the Haymarket, one could observe a diminution of the usual throng. Midnight is the hour of high-tide on that reef of shipwrecked souls. When the casinos and music-rooms close, their occupants – except the few whose broughams roll them westward to abodes of more secluded vice – flood the adjacent pavements, and gradually subside into the taverns, cafés, and supper-rooms, where paramours may be found or awaited. Tonight there was another and a purer meeting-place open to as many as would enter. [...] nearly every chair has its female occupant. A hundred and fifty of the invited are already present. [...]

A glance across the room would scarcely reveal the character of the assembly. Are these the 'gay' and the 'unfortunate' – the dashing courtesans or the starveling prostitutes of the West-end? They differ very little in appearance and demeanour from as many women of 'the middle and lower middle class', to adopt Mr Gladstone's discriminating phrase – taken promiscuously. With few exceptions, there are no extravagant dresses - still less are there any symptoms of levity or indecorum. Gravely and quietly, with self-respect and silent courtesy, the refreshments provided are consumed or declined, and newcomers provided with places till not a vacant seat remains. [...] Here and there is one whose veiled or averted face indicates something of shame or disquietude; but the great majority wear an aspect of cheerful gravity that sets the observer thinking painfully how hearts thus masked may be approached. [...] The disparity of age strikes one more than before. Here are mere girls – girls of sixteen or seventeen – girls who, if seen in pure and happy homes, would have recalled the poet's image of innocent white feet touching the stream that divides childhood from womanhood – girls on whose fair faces paint and drink have not yet replaced the natural bloom with streaks and patches. Here are women of the age at which wise men seek loving helpmates, and children are born early enough to be the pillars of household happiness. And here, too, are women in their ripened prime – women who should be rejoicing, under any burden of domestic care, in the strong arm of a husband's trust and the golden girdle of sons and daughters – but women whose still healthful frames and comely features speak but of a physical vigour invulnerable to twenty years of dissolute pleasure and precarious livelihood. It is a heart – saddening thought that the youngest of these two hundred women is already old in vice – has crossed the line that can never be repassed – has loosed that zone of purity which no power even in Heaven can reclasp.

[...] It is about one o'clock when the gentlemen whose activity we have described, gather in a central space on the floor, and one of them requests attention. It is the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Noel who does this [...] If we had expected that the speaker would so err as to sermonize, we should be happily disappointed. He does not avoid these most deep-seated truths of human

duty and destiny which are the basis of religious emotion, but he does not dwell on them. He speaks like a man in the flesh, though not like a man of the world. If he were the latter, he would scarcely warn these comfortable-looking, healthy women that ten years of their present life will send them all to the grave. But there is a hearty human and almost fatherly tenderness in the emphasis he lays on the unreality of their joys, the bitterness of their reflections, the vileness of their seducers, the unworthiness of their habitual associates. He contrasts all this with the possibilities, not only of what they have lost, but of what they may regain. He offers the means of instant rescue – a home, which he takes care to assure them is not a prison; a home in which they shall be subjected to no indignity or privation, but from which they may emerge respected, perhaps beloved. He tells them of others who have thus been saved from all the misery of a sinful life. He refers to a letter from one who, forty years ago, escaped back into good repute, and has grown up in honourable married life. But all this, while he has spoken to an audience more attentive than interested, and certainly not affected. As by an afterthought, he mentions that, since their last meeting, some mother has sent him a photograph of her daughter, beseeching him to seek that lost one in this company. In an instant the sealed-up fountains are opened, and strong emotion replaces real or feigned indifference. They who heard unmoved of Divine love and human help are touched and shaken by the voice of a weeping mother. Some sob audibly in their tempest of awakened memory. Tears run down the cheeks of many. [...]

He resumes his former tone of general exhortation - an impressive and persuasive tone, we should say, did we not see how soon these fair faces have resumed their calm insensibility. He gives way to the Rev. Mr Bickersteth – a clergyman who cannot rid himself of pulpit phrases, but who speaks with an earnest humanity that should make any phraseology a power to melt and move. When he ceases, prayer is offered by Mr Brock, another Baptist minister, and one whose very face is eloquent of kind-hearted goodness. [...] It is such a prayer as every human being can join in - the fervent breathing, in homely words, of a heart that asks aid from Heaven to abate the sin and misery on earth; the sin and misery here, close at hand. ...

Mr Brock then announces, with loud and cheerful voice, that fifty – a hundred, any number – who will at once quit their present way of life, may this very night be taken to a reformatory home; and if any would return to parents at a distance, the means shall be provided. How many will go? How many will not go? We should rather say. Will not all embrace with glad gratitude this proffered rescue? Can any one of these girls and women, who have been for two hours at least restored to the company of good and honourable men and women (for two or three of the latter have aided) - can anyone deliberately go back to the trade and the society that debases and destroys? Alas, yes! Here is one, young and very fair, who replies with a firm though courteous voice, she has decided; and she will not go with the real friends who are now earnestly talking, in groups or singly, with their departing guests. With one exception, and that instantly hushed by her companions, there has been no rude refusal - but there are many who hesitate, and hesitate till they are again lost. Everyone going out seems like a captive carried off by the devil from good angels. But some twenty or more do remain, and over these, whatever chances and changes may await them on the hard road of repentance - over these may we not already rejoice, as does the good shepherd over sheep recovered from the wilderness to the fold?

Appendix 5

Josephine Butler

“The Double Standard of Morality”

The Philanthropist, October 1886

As a floating straw indicates the flow of the tide, so there are certain expressions that have become almost proverbial and till lately have passed unchallenged in conversation and in literature, plainly revealing the double standard of morality which society has accepted. One of these expressions is, "He is only sowing his wild oats;" another is, that "a reformed profligate makes a good husband." The latter is a sentiment so gross that I would not repeat it, if it were not necessary to do so - as a proof of the extent of the aberration of human judgment in this matter.

Here we are at once brought into contact with the false and misleading idea that the essence of right and wrong is in some way dependent on sex. We never hear it carelessly or complacently asserted of a young wom[a]n that "she is only sowing her wild oats." This is not a pleasant aspect of the question; but let us deal faithfully with it. It is a fact, that numbers even of moral and religious people have permitted themselves to accept and condone in man what is fiercely condemned in woman.

And do you see the logical necessity involved in this? It is that a large section of female society has to be told off - set aside, so to speak, to minister to the irregularities of the excusable man. That section is doomed to death, hurled to despair; while another section of womanhood is kept strictly and almost forcibly guarded in domestic purity. Thus even good and moral men have so judged in regard to the vice of sexual immorality as to concede in social opinion all that the male profligate can desire. This perverse social and public opinion is no small incentive to immorality. It encourages the pernicious belief that men may be profligate when young without serious detriment to their character in after-life. This is not a belief that is borne out by facts.

Marriage does not transform a man's nature, nor uproot habits that have grown with his years: the licentious imagination continues its secret blight, though the outward conduct may be restrained. The man continues to be what he was, selfish and unrestrained, though he may be outwardly moral in deference to the opinion of that "society" which having previously excused his vices, now expects him to be moral. And what of that other being, his partner - his wife - into whose presence he brings the secret consciousness, it may be the hideous morbid fruits of his former impurity? Can any man, with any pretension to true manliness, contemplate calmly the shame - the cruelty - of the fact that such marriages are not exceptional, especially in the upper classes?

The consequences of sins of impurity far out-last the sin itself, both in individuals and in communities. Worldly and impure men have thought, and still think, they can separate women, as I have said, into two classes - the protected and refined ladies who are not only to be good, but who are, if possible, to know nothing except what is good; and those poor outcast daughters of the people whom they purchase with money, and with whom they think

they may consort in evil whenever it pleases them to do so, before returning to their own separated and protected homes.

The double standard of morality owes its continued existence very greatly to the want of a common sentiment concerning morality on the part of men and women, especially in the more refined classes of society. Men are driven away at an early age from the society of women and thrown upon the society of each other only - in schools, colleges, barracks, etc.; and thus they have concocted and cherished a wholly different standard of moral purity from that generally existing among women. Even those men who are personally pure and blameless become persuaded by the force of familiarity with male profligacy around them, that this sin in man is venial and excusable. They interpret the ignorance and silence of women as indulgent acquiescence and support.

Women are guilty also in this matter, for they unfortunately have imitated the tone and sentiments of men, instead of chastening and condemning them; and have shown, too often, very little indeed of the horror which they profess to feel for sins of impurity. Now we have the profound conviction that not only must as many men and women as possible severally understand the truth concerning their relations to each other, but also that they must learn the lesson in each other's presence, and with each other's help. A deeply-reaching mutual sympathy and common knowledge must (if we are ever to have any real reform) take the place of the life-long separation and antipathetic sentiments which have prevailed in the past. Obviously, then, the essence of the great work which we propose to ourselves, is to Christianize public opinion, until both in theory and practice, it shall recognize the fundamental truth that the essence of right and wrong is in no way dependent upon sex, and shall demand of men precisely the same chastity as it demands of women.

It is a tremendous work which we have on hand. Licentiousness is blasting the souls and bodies of thousands of men and women, chiefly through the guilt of the men of the upper and educated classes. The homes of the poor are blighted - the women among the poor are crushed - by this licentiousness, which ever goes hand in hand with the most galling tyranny of the strong over the weak. The press and the pulpit, apparently dismayed by the enormity of the evil, the one sometimes in sympathy with it, the other losing faith in the power of God and in spiritual revival, have ceased altogether to administer any adequate rebuke. In our homes and in social circles mistaken delicacy has come to the aid of cowardice, and the truth is betrayed even in the house of its friends. The warnings of God are concealed, and young men and women are left to be taught by sad and irremediable experience the moral truths which should be impressed upon them early in life by faithful instructors.

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